

Galaxy

MAGAZINE

AUGUST 1959

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NO LIFE
OF THEIR OWN

by

CLIFFORD
D. SIMAK

•

THE MALTED
MILK MONSTER

by

WILLIAM
TENN

•

MUGWUMP
FOUR

by

ROBERT
SILVERBERG

•

ORBIT AROUND
THE SUN

by

WILLY LEY

And Other Stories



AUGUST, 1959

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ROBERT M. GUINN, Publisher

H. L. GOLD, Editor

WILLY LEY, Science Editor

W. I. VAN DER POEL, Art Director

JOAN J. De MARIO, Asst. to the Publisher

SONDRA GRESSEN, Asst. to Editor

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THOUGHT FOR FOOD

FROM the editorial point of view, humanity has two cardinal sins: excessive pessimism and excessive optimism. These sins are cardinal because, editorially speaking, they are the least original.

An easy way of testing that statement—aside from how to do it—would be to take a pair of science fiction writers from the late 19th century, plunge them into a modern supermarket to simmer for one hour, then return them to their own shells and let come to a boil.

One would manufacture a Utopia of ready-made foods; the other would see only a blight of mechanized feeding.

Both, of course, would be partly right, demonstrating once more that few things are all advantage or disadvantage. Anything that frees women of 16 hours a day over cranky wood or coal ranges must be rated an advantage, especially when variety is so immensely increased and packaging is so much more attractive, sanitary and, by law, honest. On the other hand, the mixes and instants and suchlike are

pretty much dried cuds from mechanical stomachs, the precooked meals are more industrial engineering than cookery, and the spread between farm and retail price is almost as wide as between farm and restaurant.

Given time to visit a bookstore, our ancestral authors would want only to see if their own books were still around, and then perhaps a dazzled skimming of volumes on science and history. Chances are they wouldn't get to the cookbook shelves at all.

A shame—they'd be missing two big gold-stamped tomes, handsomely slipcased, prodigiously illustrated with color photographs of foods and settings and naperies of a beauty no painter has ever matched, and literally thousands of recipes that would tempt a Gandhi off his most passively resistant fast. Few of these very many recipes could have been followed everywhere at any time of the year in the 19th century. But the same techniques that give us culinary horrors like vacuum-packed chocolate-

covered ants and frozen messtray meals also free us of geography and the seasons.

WITH all the world's pastures and fisheries, dairies, groves and gardens to draw upon, one has need of all the world's recipes, and here they are in orderly profusion:

Hors-d'oeuvre, smorgasbord, antipasto, Chinese egg rolls, enchiladas — ah, Turkish beurecks: Cut $\frac{1}{2}$ pound Gruyere cheese into small pieces and place them in a saucepan with a generous $\frac{1}{4}$ cup very thick white sauce. Stir until the cheese is melted and the sauce thickens. Spread on a platter to cool and then shape into small sausages. Wrap each sausage shape in plain pastry and fry in hot deep oil (385 F.) to a light golden-brown.

"Time was," says this overlord of kitchen texts, "when the baker of inferior bread could be publicly whipped, or have his ears nailed to a post, or be pilloried with the offending loaf hung around his neck." Until this worthy practice is revived, here are recipes for splendid bread and rolls.

And soups, from every sort of consomme to creams to game soups and broths — ah, and egg bisque Biarritz: Reduce 3 quarts fish stock to $\frac{1}{2}$ its volume over a bright flame. Add 6 egg yolks beaten into 1 cup sweet cream and stir over a low flame until the mixture thickens.

Season with salt, white pepper, and freshly grated nutmeg. When ready to serve, strain the soup through a fine muslin cloth into a heated soup tureen and add a generous $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked, flaked crab meat. Sprinkle over the soup 1 tablespoon finely chopped chervil (or parsley — HLG) and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon finely chopped tarragon and serve at once with croutons.

Eggs? All the standard ways, and stuffed, fried, egg pie, au gratin, and more poaches than one might imagine, like — ah, eggs Benedict: Split and toast English muffins, allowing two halves for each serving. Cover each muffin half with a slice of broiled or sauteed aged ham or Canadian back bacon and top with a poached egg. Pour over 1 tablespoon hollandaise sauce and serve hot. (*Anyone who buys hollandaise sauce or fakes it the way mayonnaise makers suggest isn't a criminal on the grand scale of today's perpetrators of pallid breads; one ear nailed to a post should be sufficient punishment — HLG.*)

Dairy products, fresh vegetables and fruits, fish and shellfish—here is where modern techniques repeal distance and the seasons—only to have cruel and inhuman treatment dished, not to mention meted, out to these rich boons. Here are French and Chinese and Scandinavian and New England and Javanese and other ways of unlocking these treasures, such as—ah, paella:

Cut a plump chicken into serving pieces and saute the pieces in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter with 1 crushed clove of garlic until the chicken is golden brown on all sides. Remove and set aside the chicken and in the juices remaining in the pan saute 2 cups rice until it is golden. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon saffron and 4 cups hot chicken stock and cook over a very low flame until the liquid is absorbed. The rice will be only partially cooked.

Butter the bottom and sides of a deep casserole or Dutch oven. Put half the pieces of chicken in the casserole, and cover the chicken with 1 lobster, cut into pieces, 1 dozen shelled shrimp, 1 dozen mussels, 1 chorizo, the highly seasoned Spanish sausage, sliced (or *any hot sausage* — HLG) and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup diced pimentos. Add almost all the rice and top with the remaining pieces of chicken. Cover the chicken exactly as before, with lobster, shrimp, mussels, chorizo, and pimentos. Add the rest of the rice and bake the casserole, uncovered, in a moderate oven (350 F.) for 45 minutes, adding a little chicken stock from time to time if needed . . . steamed clams may be used in the paella in place of, or in addition to, the mussels.

PREFER home whipped cream to commercial lather? Try kaymak, the Near Eastern clotted cream which makes even home

whipped cream taste like spineless froth: Bring 1 quart heavy cream to a boil in a large kettle, over very slow heat. Lift a ladleful of the cream out of the kettle and pour it back from a height, to make as many bubbles as possible. Continue this process for 30 minutes to 1 hour, until the pan is full of cream bubbles. Put the kettle in a warm place for 2 hours, then chill the cream well. The cream that sets on top of the liquid is the kaymak; it may be spooned off or cut off with a sharp knife and served in slices. (*Use it exactly the way you would whipped cream* — HLG.)

Only halfway through the first volume, with two brief dips into the second, and no room for any sample recipes of the meat and vegetable dishes, the aspics and preserves and sauces, the soufflés and omelets and salads, cakes and puddings and pastries — dishes by the thousands, menu combinations by the million.

The title of this gastronomical Fort Knox? It's *The Gourmet Cookbook*, a record of terrestrial cookery that should be in every micro-library on every world we colonize. The strange foods and seasonings we find there will seem less strange when checked — and cooked — against the vast variety listed herein. The \$25 price isn't high for being the best cook in town — or among the stars.

— H. L. GOLD

MISSING SOMETHING?



TWICE IN TIME

By Manly Wade Wellman

Ironical destiny of a visitor from the future trying to take advantage of things to come.



ADDRESS CENTAURI

By F. L. Wallace

Earth was too perfect for these extraordinary exiles — to belong to it, they had to flee it.



MISSION OF GRAVITY

By Hal Clement

All the science on earth might not be able to meet the demands of this alien race.



THE FOREVER MACHINE

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MA and Pa were fighting again, not really mad at one another, but arguing pretty loud. They had been at it, off and on, for weeks.

"We just can't up and leave!" said Ma. "We have to think it out. We can't pull up and leave a place we've lived in all our lives without *some* thinking on it!"

"I *have* thought on it!" Pa said. "I've thought on it a *lot*! All these aliens moving in. There was a brood of new ones moved onto the Pierce place just a day or two ago."

"How do you know," asked Ma, "that you'll like one of the Homestead Planets once you settle on it? It might be worse than Earth."

"We can't be any more unlucky there than we been right here! There ain't *anything* gone right. I don't mind telling you I am plumb discouraged."

And Pa sure-God was right about how unlucky we had been. The tomato crop had failed and two of the cows had died and a bear had robbed the bees and busted up the hives and the tractor had broken down and cost \$78.90 to get fixed.

"Everyone has some bad luck,"



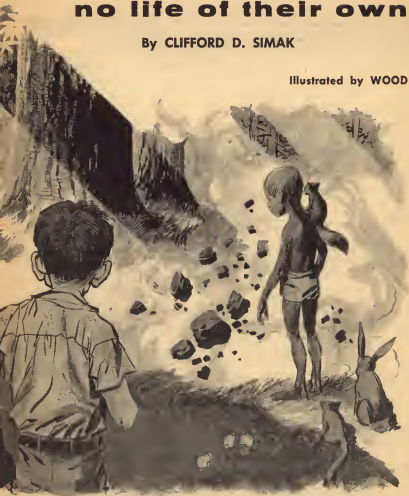
neighbors— but just wait till they see

their native relatives who actually have . . .

no life of their own

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Illustrated by WOOD



Ma argued. "You'd have it no matter where you go."

"Andy Carter doesn't have bad luck!" yelled Pa. "I don't know how he does it, but everything he does, it turns out to a hair. He could fall down in a puddle and come up dripping diamonds!"

"I don't know," said Ma philosophically. "We got enough to eat and clothes to cover us and a roof above our head. Maybe that's as much as anyone can expect these days."

"It ain't enough," Pa said. "A man shouldn't be content to just scrape along. I lay awake at night to figure out how I can manage better. I've laid out plans that should by rights have worked. But they never did. Like the time we tried that new adapted pea from Mars down on the bottom forty. It was sandy soil and they should have grown there. They ain't worth a damn on any land that will grow another thing. And that land was worthless; it should have been just right for those Martian peas. But I ask you, did they grow there?"

"No," said Ma, "now that I recollect, they didn't."

"And the next year, what happens? Andy Carter plants the same kind of peas just across the fence from where I tried to grow them. Same kind of land and all. And Andy gets bow-legged hauling those peas home."

WHAT Pa said was true. He was a better farmer than Andy Carter could ever hope to be. And he was smarter, too. But let Pa try a thing and bad luck would beat him out. Let Andy try the same and it always went right.

And it wasn't Pa alone. It was the entire neighborhood. Everybody was just plain unlucky, except Andy Carter.

"I tell you," Pa swore, "just one more piece of bad luck and we'll throw in our hand and start over somewhere fresh. And the Homestead Planets seem the best to me. Why, you take . . ."

I didn't wait to hear any more. I knew it would go on the way it always had. So I snuck out without their seeing me and went down the road, and as I walked along, I worried that maybe one of these days they might make up their mind to move to one of the Homestead Planets. There had been an awful lot of our old neighbors who'd done exactly that.

It might be all right to emigrate, of course, but whenever I thought about it, I got a funny feeling at the thought of leaving Earth. Those other planets were so awful far away, one wouldn't have much chance of getting back again if he didn't like them. And all my friends were right in the neighborhood, and they were pretty good friends even if they were all aliens.

I got a little start when I

thought of that. It was the first time it had occurred to me that they all were aliens. I had so much fun with them, I'd never thought of it.

It seemed a little queer to me that Ma and Pa should be talking about leaving Earth when all the farms that had been sold in our neighborhood had been bought up by aliens. The Homestead Planets weren't open to the aliens and that might be the reason they came to Earth. If they'd had a choice, maybe they would have gone to one of the Homesteads instead of settling down on Earth.

I walked past the Carter place and saw that the trees in the orchard were loaded down with fruit and I figured that some of us could sneak in and steal some of it when it got ripe. But we'd have to be careful, because Andy Carter was a stinker, and his hired man, Ozzie Burns, wasn't one bit better. I remembered the time we had been stealing watermelons and Andy had found us at it and I'd got caught in a barbed-wire fence when we ran away. Andy had walloped me, which was all right. But there'd been no call for him going to Pa and collecting seven dollars for the few melons we had stolen. Pa had paid up and then he'd walloped me again, worse than Andy did.

And after it was over, Pa had said bitterly that Andy was no

great shakes of a neighbor. And Pa was right. He wasn't.

I GOT down to the old Adams place and Fancy Pants was out in the yard, just floating there and bouncing that old basketball off his.

We call him Fancy Pants because we can't pronounce his name. Some of these alien people have very funny names.

Fancy Pants was all dressed up as usual. He always is dressed up because he never gets the least bit dirty when he plays. Ma is always asking me why I can't keep neat and clean like Fancy Pants. I tell her it would be easy if I could float along like him and never had to walk, and if I could throw mudballs like him without touching them.

This Sunday morning he was dressed up in a sky-blue shirt that looked like silk, and red britches that looked as if they might be velvet, and he had a green bow tied around his yellow curls that floated in the breeze. At first glance, Fancy Pants looked something like a girl — but you better never say so, because he'd mop up the road with you. He did with me the first time I saw him. He didn't even lay a hand on me while he was doing it, but sat up there, cross-legged, about three feet off the ground, smiling that sweet smile of his on his ugly face, and

with his yellow curls floating in the breeze. And the worst of it was that I couldn't get back at him.

But that was long ago and we were good friends now.

We played catch for a while, but it wasn't too much fun.

Then Fancy Pants' Pa came out of the house and he was glad to see me, too. He asked about the folks and wanted to know if the tractor was all right, now that we'd got it fixed. I answered him politely because I'm a little scared of Fancy Pants' Pa.

He is sort of spooky — not the way he looks, the way he does things. From the looks of him, he wasn't meant to be a farmer, but he does all right at it. He doesn't use a plow to plow a field. He just sits cross-legged in the air and floats up and down the field, and when he passes over a strip of ground, that strip of ground is plowed — and not only plowed, but raked and harrowed until it is as fine as face powder. He does all his work that way. There aren't any weeds in any of his crops, for he just sails up and down the rows and the weeds come out slick and clean, with the roots intact, to lie on the ground and wither.

It doesn't take too much imagination to see what a guy like that could do if he ever caught a kid in any sort of mischief, so all of us are thoughtful and polite whenever he's around.

So I told him how we'd got the tractor all fixed up and about the bear busting up the bee hives. Then I asked him about his time machine and he shook his head real sad.

"I don't know what's the matter, Steve," he said. "I put things into it and they disappear, and I should find them later, but I never have. If I'm moving them in time, I'm perhaps pushing them too far."

He would have told me more about his time machine, but there was an interruption.

While we had been talking, Fancy Pants' Pa and me, the Fancy Pants dog had run a cat up a maple tree. That is the normal situation for any cat and dog — unless Fancy Pants is around.

FOR Fancy Pants wasn't one to leave a situation normal. He reached up into the tree — well, he didn't reach up with his hands, of course, but with whatever he reaches with — and he nailed this cat and sort of bundled it up so it couldn't move and brought it down to the ground.

Then he held the dog so the dog couldn't do more than twitch and he put that bundled-up cat down in front of the twitching dog, then let them loose with split-second timing.

The two of them exploded into a blur of motion, with the weirdest uproar you ever heard. The cat

made it to the tree in the fastest time and nearly took off the bark swarming up the trunk. And the dog miscalculated and failed to put on his brakes in time and banged smack into the tree spread-eagled.

The cat by this time was up in the highest branches, hanging on and screaming, while the dog walked around in circles, acting kind of stunned.

Fancy Pants' Pa broke off what he was saying to me and he looked at Fancy Pants. He didn't do or say a thing, but when he looked at Fancy Pants, Fancy Pants grew terribly pale and sort of wilted down.

"Let that teach you," said Fancy Pants' Pa, "to leave those animals alone. You don't see Steve here or Nature Boy mistreating them that way, do you?"

"No, sir," mumbled Fancy Pants.

"And now get along, the two of you. You have things to do."

I got this to say for Fancy Pants' Pa: he gives Fancy Pants his lickings, or whatever they may be, and then he forgets about it. He doesn't keep on harping at it for the rest of the day.

SO Fancy Pants and me went down the road, me shuffling along, kicking up the dust, and Fancy Pants floating along beside me.

We got down to Nature Boy's place and he was waiting out in front. I knew he had been hoping someone would come along. There were a couple of sparrows sitting on his shoulder and a rabbit hopping all around him and a chipmunk in the pocket of his pants, looking out at us with bright and beady eyes.

Nature Boy and I sat down underneath a tree and Fancy Pants came as close as he ever does to sitting down — floating about three inches off the ground — and we talked about what we ought to do. Trouble was, there wasn't really anything that needed any doing. So we sat there and talked and tossed pebbles and pulled stems of grass and put them in our mouths and chewed them, while Nature Boy's pet wild things gambled all around us and didn't seem to be afraid at all. Except that they were a little leary of Fancy Pants. He is, when you come right down to it, a sort of sneaky rascal. Me they are fast friends with when I'm with Nature Boy, but let me meet them when I am alone and they keep their distance.

I can see how wild things might take to Nature Boy. He is fur all over, real sleek, glossy fur, and he wears nothing but that little pair of pants. Turn him loose without those pants and someone would be bound to take a shot at him.

SO we sat there wondering what to do. Then I remembered that Pa had said a new family had moved onto the Pierce place and we decided to go down and see if they had any kids.

We went down the road to the old Pierce place and it turned out there was one just about our age. He was a sort of runty little kid, with a peaked face and big round eyes and kind of eager look about him, like a stunted hoot owl.

He told us his name and it was even worse than Nature Boy's and Fancy Pants' names, so we had a vote on it and decided we would call him Butch. That suited him just fine.

Then he called out his family and they stood in a row, like a bunch of solemn, runty owls roosting on a limb, while he introduced them. There was his Ma and Pa and a little brother and a kid sister almost as big as he was. The rest of them went back into the house, but Butch's Pa squatted down and began to talk with us.

You could see from the way he talked that he was a little scared of this farming business. He admitted he really was no farmer, but an optical worker, and explained to us that an optical worker designed lenses and ground them. But, he said, there was no future in a job like that back on his old home planet. He told us how glad he was to be on Earth

and how he wanted to be a good citizen and a good neighbor, and a lot of other things like that.

When he started to run down, we got away from him. There ain't anything more embarrassing than a crazy adult who likes to talk with kids.

We decided that maybe we should show Butch around a bit and let him in on some of the things we had been doing.

So we struck off down Dark Hollow and we didn't make much time because all of these friends of Nature Boy were popping out to join him. Before very long, we were a sort of traveling menagerie — rabbits and chipmunks and a gopher or two and a couple of raccoons.

I like Nature Boy, of course, and I've had some good times with him, but he has spoiled a lot of fun as well. Before he showed up in the neighborhood, I did a lot of fishing and hunting, but that is all spoiled now. I can't shoot a squirrel or catch a fish without wondering if it is a friend of Nature Boy's.

After a while, we got down to the creek bed where we were digging out the lizard. We'd been at it all summer long and we hadn't uncovered very much of him, but we still figured that some day we might get him all dug out.

You understand that it wasn't a live lizard we were digging out,

but a lizard that had turned to stone a zillion years ago.

There is a place where the stream runs down a limestone ledge and the limestone lies in layers. The lizard was between two of those layers. We'd got four or five feet of his tail uncovered. But the digging was getting harder, for we were working back into the limestone ledge and there was more of it to move.

FANCY Pants floated up above the limestone ledge and got himself set as solid as he could. Sitting there, he hit that limestone ledge a tremendous whack, being very careful not to crack the lizard. It was one of his better whacks, busting up a lot of stone, and while Fancy Pants rested up to take another one, the three of us piled in and threw out the busted rock.

But there was one big piece he had loosened up that we couldn't move.

"Hit it just a tap," I told him. "Break it up a little and we can get it out."

"I got it loose," he said. "It's up to you to get it out."

There was no sense arguing with him. So the three of us wrestled at the rock, but we couldn't budge it and Fancy Pants sat up there, fat and sassy, taking it easy and enjoying himself.

"You ought to have a crowbar," he told us. "If you had a crowbar,

you could pry that rock out."

I was getting sick and tired of Fancy Pants, and so, just to get away from him for a while, I said I'd go and fetch a crowbar. And this new kid, this Butch, said he'd go along with me.

So we left Nature Boy and Fancy Pants and climbed up to the road and started out for my place. We didn't hurry any. It would serve Fancy Pants right if he had to wait, and Nature Boy as well, for all his showing off with his animals.

We walked along the road and talked. Butch told me about the planet he had come from and it sure was a poor-mouth place, and I told him about the neighborhood, and we were getting to be friends.

We reached the Carter place and were walking past the orchard when Butch stopped dead in the middle of the road and went sort of stiff, like a hunting dog will go when he scents a bird.

I was walking right behind him and I bumped into him, but he just stood there with those eager eyes agleam and his entire body tense — so tense it seemed to quiver when it really didn't.

"What's going on?" I asked.

He kept on looking at something in the orchard. I took a look where he was looking and I couldn't see a thing.

Then he turned around like a

flash and jumped the fence on the downhill side of the road and went lickety-split down across the field opposite the orchard. I jumped the fence and ran after him and caught him just before he reached the woods. I grabbed him by the shoulder and spun him around to face me. It wasn't hard to do, he was such a spindly kid.

"What's the matter with you?" I hollered. "Where do you think you're going?"

"Home to get my gun!"

"Your *gun*? What for?"

"There's a whole bunch of them up there! We have to clean them out!"

He must have seen I didn't understand.

"Don't tell me," he said, "that you didn't see them?"

I shook my head. "There wasn't anything there."

"They're there, all right," he said. "Maybe you can't see them. Maybe you're like old folks."

THERE'S no one who can accuse me of a thing like that. I doubled up my fist and poked it underneath his nose. He hurried up to explain.

"They're things that only kids can see. And they bring bad luck. You can't leave them around or you'll have bad luck all the time."

I didn't believe it right away. But after all the things I'd seen done by Nature Boy and Fancy

Pants, you don't ever catch me saying straight out that a thing's impossible.

And after I'd thought it over for a minute, it made a silly sort of sense. For the folks certainly had been plagued by hard luck for a long time now and it didn't stand to reason that luck should be all bad and never any good unless there was something making it that way.

And it wasn't the folks alone, but all the other neighbors — all of them, of course, except Andy Carter, and Andy Carter was too mean to be bothered by bad luck.

We were, I thought, sure a hard-luck neighborhood.

"All right," I said to Butch. "Let's go and get that gun."

And I was thinking even as I said it that it must be a funny kind of gun that would shoot a thing one couldn't even see.

We made it back to the old Pierce place in almost no time at all. Butch's Pa was sitting out underneath a tree, feeling sorry for himself. Butch came up to him and started jabbering and I couldn't understand a word.

His Pa listened to him for a while and then broke in. "You should talk this planet's language, son. It is most impolite to do otherwise. And you want to become a good citizen of this great and glorious planet, I am sure, and there's no better way to do

it than to talk its language and observe its customs and try to live the way its people do."

I'll say this much for him: Butch's Pa sure knew how to fling around the words.

"Is it true, mister," I asked him, "that these things can bring bad luck?"

"Most assuredly," said Butch's Pa. "Back on our old home planet, we know them well."

"Pa," asked Butch, "should I get my gun?"

"Now I don't know," said his Pa. "It's something we have to give some study. Back on our home planet, there would be no question of it. But this is a different planet and it may have different ways. It may be that the man who has these creatures would object to your shooting them."

"But there isn't anyone really got them," I declared. "How can you have a thing when you can't even see it?"

"I was thinking about the gentleman in whose orchard they appeared."

"You mean Andy Carter. He doesn't know anything about them."

"That does not matter," said Butch's Pa, with a great deal of righteousness. "It becomes, it would seem to me, a quite deep problem in ethics. On our home planet, no man would want these

things; he'd be ashamed to have them. But here it might be different. They bring good luck, you see, to the ones that they adopt."

"You mean they bring good luck to Andy?" I asked him. "But I thought you said that they brought bad luck."

"So they do," said Butch's Pa, "except to the ones that they adopt. To them they bring good luck, but bad luck to all the others. For it is an axiom that fortune for one man is misfortune for the rest. That is why we do not let them adopt any of us on our home planet."

"You think they have adopted Andy and that's why he has good luck?"

"You are most correct," said Butch's Pa. "You have admirably grasped the concept."

"Well, gee, why don't we just go in and shoot them?"

"This Carter gentleman would not object to your doing so?"

"Of course he would, but that's what you would expect of him. He'd probably run us off the place before we got the job half done, but we could sneak back again..."

"No," Butch's Pa said flat out.

He was an awful stickler for doing the right thing, Butch's Pa was — bound and determined he wasn't going to get caught off base doing something wrong.

"That is not the way to do," he said. "It is most unethical. You

think that if this Carter knew he had these things, he would want to keep them?"

"I am sure he would. He doesn't care for anybody but himself."

Butch's Pa heaved a big sigh and crawled to his feet. "Young man, would your father be at home?"

"He most likely would."

"We'll go and talk with him," he said. "He is a native of this planet and an honest man and he will tell us what is right."

"Mister," I asked him, "what do you call these things?"

"We have a name for them, but it does not translate into your tongue with anything like ease. We call them something that is neither here nor there, something that is halfway between. Halfling would be the word for it, if there is such a word."

"I don't know if there is or not," I said, "but it sounds right."

"Then," decided Butch's Pa, "for sheer convenience we shall call them that."

AT first, Pa was as flabbergasted as I was, but the more he listened to Butch's Pa and the more he thought about it, the more he seemed to become convinced there might be something to it.

"There sure-God has been something causing all this hard luck of ours," he declared. "A man can't turn his hand to a thing but

it goes wrong on him. And I must admit that it makes a man sore to have all these things happen to him and then look at Carter and see all the good luck he has."

"I am profoundly sorry," said Butch's Pa, "to discover halflings exist on this planet. There were many on our old home planet and on some of the neighboring worlds, but I had no idea they had spread this far."

"What I don't rightly understand," said Pa, lighting up his pipe and settling down to hash the matter over, "is how they can be here and a man not see them."

"There is a most precise scientific explanation, but I have not the language to translate it. You might say that they are off-phase of this existence, but still not quite into it. The child eye is undulled, the mind unclosed, so that they can see somewhat, a fraction, just a little, beyond reality. And that is why they can be seen by children but are invisible to adults. I, in my time, when I was a child, saw and killed my share of them. You understand, sir, that on my planet, it is an accepted childish chore to be eternally on watch for them and vigilantly keep their numbers down."

Pa asked me: "You didn't see these things?"

"No, Pa," I said, "I didn't."

"And you didn't see them, either?" Pa asked Butch's Pa.

"I lost my ability to see them many years ago," said Butch's Pa. "So far as your boy is concerned, it may be that only the children of certain races—"

"But they must see us," Pa insisted. "Otherwise, how would they be able to bring good luck or bad?"

"They do see us. In that, all are agreed. I assure you that the scientists of my planet have devoted many long and arduous years to the study of these beings."

"And another thing. What is their purpose in adopting people? What do they get out of it? Why should they show all this favoritism?"

"We are not sure," said Butch's Pa. "There are several theories. One is that they have no life of their own, but must have a pattern in order to live. If they did not have a pattern, they would have no form nor senses and probably no perception. They are, it would seem, like parasites in many ways."

But Pa interrupted him. Pa was all wound up and had a lot of thinking that he had to do out loud.

"I don't suppose," he said, "that they are doing it just for the hell of it. There must be a solid reason — there is to everything. It seems reasonable to me that everything is planned, that there's nothing without purpose. There's nothing, when you get right down to it,

that basically is bad. Maybe these things, with the bad luck that they bring, are part of a plan to make folks face up to adversity and develop character."

I SWEAR it was the first time I had ever heard Pa sound like a preacher, but he sure did then.

"You may be right," said Butch's Pa. "There is no agreement entirely on the reason for their being."

"They might," suggested Pa, "be a sort of gypsy tribe, just wandering around. They might up and move away."

Butch's Pa sadly shook his head. "It almost never happens, sir, that they move away."

"When I was a kid, I once went to the city with my Ma. I don't remember much about it, but I do remember standing in front of a great big window that was filled with toys and knowing that I never could have any one of them, and wishing hard that some day I might have just one of them. Maybe that's the way it is with these folks. Maybe they're just outside the window looking in on us."

"Your analogy is exceedingly picturesque," said Butch's Pa with forthright admiration.

"But here I am running on," Pa said, "as if I took for gospel every word of it. I don't wish for

the world to doubt you or what told us . . ."

"But you do and I cannot find it in my breast to blame you. Would you, perhaps, believe more readily if your son could tell you that he saw them?"

"Why, yes," Pa said thoughtfully. "I surely would."

"Before I came to Earth, I was a worker in the field of optics, and it may be possible that I can grind a set of lenses that would allow your son to see halflings. I am not sure he could, of course, but it is a chance worth taking. He is of the age to have still that ability to peer beyond reality. It may be that all his vision needs is a slight correction."

"If you could do that, if Steve here could really see these things, then I would believe you without the slightest question."

"I'll get on with it immediately," said Butch's Pa. "Later on, we can discuss the ethics of the situation."

PA sat watching Butch and his Pa going down the road, and he sort of shuddered. "Some of these aliens sure-God come up with queer ideas. A man has got to watch himself or he might swallow some of them."

"These ones are all right," I told him.

Pa sat there thinking and I could almost see the wheels whir-

ring in his brain. "I don't know too much about it, but the more one thinks about it, the more sense it makes. It seems reasonable to me that there might be just so much good luck and so much bad luck, and ordinarily both the good and the bad would be handed out in somewhat equal parts. But suppose something came along and corralled all the good luck for one particular man, then there ain't anything but bad luck left for the rest."

I wished that I could see it as clear as Pa. But the more I thought, the more like Greek it seemed.

"Maybe," said Pa, "when you get to the root of it, it's nothing more than simple competition. What is good luck for one man is bad luck for another. Say there is a job that everybody wants. One man gets it and that's good luck for him, but bad luck for the others. And say that this bear back in the woods just had to raid a hive. It would be bad luck for the man whose hive was raided, but good luck — or at least not bad luck — for the man whose hive the bear passed up. And say again that someone's tractor had to get busted . . ."

Pa went on like that for quite a while, but I don't think he even fooled himself. Both of us knew, I guess, that there would have to be more to it than that.

FANCY Pants and Nature Boy were sore at me for not coming back with the crowbar. They said I stood them up and I had to explain to them I hadn't and I had to tell them exactly what had happened before they would believe me. I suppose it might have been better if I had kept my mouth shut, but in the end I don't believe it made much difference.

Anyhow, we got to be friends again and we all liked Butch, so we had good times together. The other two kidded Butch a lot about the halflings at first, but Butch didn't seem to mind, so they gave it up.

We certainly had a good time that summer. There was the lizard and a lot of other things as well, including the family of skunks that fell in love with Nature Boy and followed him around. And there was the time Fancy Pants hauled all of Carter's machinery out into the back forty, with Andy hunting for it like lost cows and madder by the minute.

At home, and elsewhere in the neighborhood, there was still bad luck. The day the barn caved in, Pa was ready to admit flat out that there was something to what Butch's Pa had said. It was all Ma could do to keep him from going up the road to see Andy Carter and talk to him by hand.

I had another birthday and the

folks gave me a live-it set and that was something I had not expected. I had wanted one, of course, but I knew they cost a lot and with all the bad luck they had been having, the folks were short of money.

You know what a live-it is, of course. It's something like TV, only better. TV you only watch and with a live-it set you live it.

It's a viewer that you clamp onto your head and you look into it and you pick your channel and turn it on, then settle back and live the things you see.

It doesn't take any imagination to live it, because it all is there — the action and the sound and smell and even, to some extent, the actual feel of it.

My set was just a kid's set and I could only get the kid channels. But that was all right with me. I wouldn't have wanted to live through all that mushy stuff.

All morning I spent with my live-it. There was one thing called "Survey Incident" and it was all about what happened when a human survey team put down on an alien planet. Another one was about a hunting trip on a jungle world and a third was "Robin Hood." I think, of the three of them, I liked "Robin Hood" the best.

I was all puffed up with pleasure and pride and I wanted to show the kids what the folks had

given me. So I took the live-it and went down to Fancy Pants' place. But I never got a chance to show the live-it to him.

JUST before I got to the gate, I saw Fancy Pants floating along, silent and sneaky — and floating along beside him, not more than a yard away, was that poor, beat-up, bedraggled cat that Fancy Pants was always pestering. He had the cat all wrapped up in a tight bundle and it couldn't move a muscle, but I could see its eyes were wide with fright. If you ask me, that cat had a right to be afraid. There was scarcely anything in the book Fancy Pants hadn't done to it.

"Hi, Fancy Pants!" I yelled.

He put a finger to his lips and crooked another finger to let me know I could join him in whatever he was doing. So I jumped the fence and Fancy Pants floated lower until he was about my level.

"What's going on?" I asked him.

"He went away and forgot to close the padlock," whispered Fancy Pants.

"Who went away?"

"My Pa. He forgot to lock the door to the old machine shed."

"But that's where—"

"Sure," said Fancy Pants. "That's where he's got the time machine."

"Fancy Pants, you don't intend to put that cat in there!"

"Why not? Pa ain't ever tried a living thing in it and I want to see what happens."

I didn't like it and yet I wanted awful bad to see that time machine. I wondered what one looked like. No one had seen the time machine except Fancy Pants' Pa.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Fancy Pants. "Are you going chicken on me?"

"But the cat!"

"For the love of Mike, it's nothing but a cat."

And that was right, of course. It was nothing but a cat.

So I went along with him and we sneaked into the shed and pulled the door behind us. And there was the time machine in the middle of the floor.

It didn't look like much. It was a kind of hopper, and a bunch of things like coils ran around the throat where the hopper narrowed down, and that was all except for a crude control board that was nailed onto a post and hooked up to the hopper with a lot of wires.

The hopper came up to my chest and I put my live-it down on the edge of it and craned my neck to look into the throat to see what I could see.

At just that moment, Fancy Pants threw the switch that



turned it on. I jerked away. For it was a scary business when you turned that hopper on.

WHEN I sneaked back to have another look, it looked for all the world as if it were a whirlpool of cream, sort of thick and rich and shiny — and it was alive. You could see the liveness in it. And there was a feeling in it that maybe you should just jump in head first and I had to grip the edges of the hopper hard not to.

I *might* have dived in, if the cat at that very moment hadn't somehow wiggled free from Fancy Pants.

I don't know how that cat did it. Fancy Pants had it all rolled into a ball and really buttoned up. Maybe Fancy Pants got careless or maybe the cat had finally figured out an angle. But, anyhow, Fancy Pants had the cat poised above the hopper and was about to let it fall. The cat didn't get loose in part — it got loose entirely — and there it was, yowling and screaming, tail fluffed out, clawing at thin air to keep from falling down into the hopper. It managed to throw itself to one side as it fell and the claws of one paw hooked onto the hopper's edge while the other hooked into my live-it set.

I let out a yell and made a grab to try to save the live-it,

but I was too late. The cat dragged it off balance and it slid down into that creamy whirlpool and was gone.

The cat shinnied up a post and up into the rafters and hung there, screaming and wailing.

Just then the door came open and there floated Fancy Pants' Pa and we were caught red-handed.

I figured Fancy Pants' Pa would give me the works right then and there.

But he didn't do a thing. He just floated there for a moment looking at the two of us.

Then he looked at me alone and said: "Steve, please leave."

I went out that door as fast as I could go, with just a fast glance back over my shoulder at Fancy Pants. He was pale and already beginning to appear a little shriveled. He knew what he had coming to him, and even while I realized that he deserved every bit of it, I still felt sorry for him.

But staying wouldn't help him and I was glad enough to get off scot-free.

Except that it wasn't scot-free.

I don't know what was the matter with me — just scared stiff, I guess. Anyhow, I went straight home and told Pa right out about it and he took down the strap from behind the door and let me have a few.

But it seemed to me that he didn't have his heart in it. He was getting a little uneasy about all these alien goings-on.

For several days, I didn't go off the place. To have gone anywhere, I would have had to walk past Fancy Pants' house and I didn't want to see him — not for a while, at least.

Then one day Butch and his Pa showed up and they had the glasses.

"I don't know if they'll fit," said Butch's Pa. "I had to guess the fitting."

THEY looked just like any other glasses except that the lenses had funny lines running every which way, as if someone had taken the glass and twisted it until it was all crinkled out of shape.

I put them on and they were a bit loose and things looked different through them, but not a great deal different. I was looking at the barnyard when I put them on. The barnyard was still there, but it appeared strange and a little weird, although it was hard to put a finger on what was wrong with it. It was a bright, hot August day and the sun was shining hard, but when I put the glasses on, it seemed suddenly to get cloudy and a little cold. And that was some of the difference, but not all of it.

There was a feeling of strange-

ness that sent a shiver through me, and the light was wrong, and worst of all was the sense that I didn't belong. But there was nothing you could say flat out was absolutely wrong.

"It is any different, son?" asked Pa.

"Some different," I answered.

"Let me see."

He took the glasses off me and put them on himself.

"I can't see a thing," he said.

"Just a lot of color."

"I told you," said Butch's Pa, "that only the young can see. You and I are too fixed in reality."

Pa took the glasses off and let them dangle in his hand.

"Did you see any halfings?" he asked me.

I shook my head.

"There are no halfings here," said Butch.

"To see the halfings," Butch's Pa put in, "we must journey to the Carter place."

"Well, then," said Pa, "what are we waiting for?"

So the four of us went up the road to the Carter place.

There didn't seem to be anyone at home and that was rather queer, for either Carter himself or Mrs. Carter or Ozzie Burns, the hired man, always stayed at home if the others had to go to town or anywhere.

We stood in the road and

Butch had himself a good look. There weren't any halfings around the buildings and there weren't any in the orchard or in any of the fields, so far as Butch could see. Pa was getting impatient. I knew what he was thinking — that he had been made a fool of by a bunch of aliens.

Then Butch said excitedly that he thought he saw a halfling down in one corner of the pasture, just at the edge of the big Dark Hollow woods, where Andy had a hay barn, but it was so far away that he could not be sure.

"Give your boy the glasses," said Butch's Pa, "and let him have a look."

Pa handed me the glasses and I put them on. I had a hard time getting familiar landmarks sorted out, but finally I did, and sure enough, down in the corner of the pasture, there were things moving around that looked like human beings, but mighty funny human beings. They had a sort of smoky look about them, as if you could blow them away.

"Well, what do you see?" asked Pa.

I TOLD him what I saw and he stood there considering, rubbing his hand back and forth across his chin, with the whiskers grating.

"There doesn't seem to be a soul around," he said. "I don't

suppose it would hurt if we went down there. If the things are there, I want Steve to have a good, hard look at them."

"You think it is all right?" asked Butch's Pa, worried. "It's not unethical?"

"Well, sure," said Pa, "I suppose it is. But if we are quick about it and get out right away, Andy never need know."

So we crawled underneath the fence and went over the pasture and crossed into the woods so we could sneak up on the place where we had seen the halfings.

The going was a little rough, for in places the brush was rather heavy, and there were thick blackberry patches with the bushes loaded with black and shiny fruit.

But we sneaked along as quietly as we could and we finally reached a point opposite the place where we had seen the halfings.

Butch nudged me and whispered fiercely: "There they are!"

I put the glasses on and there they were, by golly.

Up at the edge of the hayfield, just beyond the woods, stood Andy's hay barn, really just a roof set on poles to cover the hay that Andy didn't have the room to get into his regular barn.

It was a rundown, dilapidated thing, and there was Andy standing up there on the roof, and

some packs of shingles sat on the roof beside him, while climbing up a ladder with a bunch of shingles on his shoulder was Ozzie Burns, the hired man. Andy was reaching down to get the shingles that Ozzie was carrying up the ladder and at the foot of the ladder, hanging onto it so it wouldn't tip, was Mrs. Burns. And that was the reason none of them had been around — they were all down here, fixing to patch up the shingles on the barn.

And there were the halfings, a good two dozen of them. A bunch of them were up on the roof with Andy and a couple on the ladder with the hired man and a couple more of them helping to hold up the ladder. They looked busy and energetic and efficient, and every single one of them was the spitting image of Andy Carter.

Not that they really resembled Andy, for they didn't. They were actually wraithlike things that seemed to have but little substance to them. They were little more than a smoky outline, but those smoky outlines—every single one of them — was the squat, bulldog outline of Andy Carter. And they walked like him, with a beligerent swagger, and all their motions were like his, and you could sense the meanness in them.

In the time that I was gaping at them, Ozzie Burns had handed the shingles up to Andy and clam-

bered up on the roof beside him and Mrs. Burns had stepped away from the ladder, not needing to hold it any longer, since Ozzie was safe up on the roof. I saw the ladder was standing on uneven ground and that was why she'd had to hold it.

Andy had been crouched down to lay the pack of shingles on the roof. Now he straightened up and looked toward the woods and he saw us standing there.

"What are you doing here?" he roared at us, and started down the ladder.

And now comes the funny part of it. I'll have to take it slow and try to tell it straight.

TO me, it seemed the ladder separated and became two ladders. One was standing there against the hay barn and the other left it, and the top of this second ladder began to slide along the roof and was about to fall and carry Andy with it to the ground, just as sure as shooting.

I was about to shout for Andy to look out, although I don't know why I should have. If he fell and broke his neck, it'd have been all right with me.

But just as I was about to yell, two halfings moved fast and this second ladder disappeared. It had been sliding along the roof and was about to fall, with a second Andy clinging to it and beginning

to look scared — and then suddenly there was just one ladder and one Andy instead of two.

I stood there, shaking, and I knew what I had seen, but at that moment I wouldn't admit it, not even to myself.

It was, I told myself, as if I had been looking at two separate times — at a time when the ladder should have fallen and at another time when it had not fallen because the halfings hadn't let it. I had seen good luck in actual operation. Or the averting of bad luck. Whichever it might be, it all came out the same.

And now Andy was almost at the ladder's foot and the halfings were coming down from off the roof in a helter-skelter fashion — some of them jumping off and others dropping off, and if they had been human instead of what they were, there would have been a flock of broken legs and necks.

Pa stepped out of the woods into the field and I stepped along with him. We knew we were walking into trouble, but we weren't ones to run. And trailing along behind us were Butch and his Pa, but both of them looked scared and you could see they had no heart for it.

Then Andy was down off the ladder and walking straight toward us and he sure was on the warpath. And walking along beside him, in a line on either side of

him, were all those halfings, and they kept in step with him and swung their arms like him and looked as mean as he did.

"Now, Andy," said Pa, trying to be conciliatory, "let us be reasonable." But it was quite an effort, I can tell you, for Pa to speak that way. He hated Andy Carter clear up from the ground and he sure-God had his reasons. Andy had been a rotten neighbor for an awful lot of years.

"Don't you tell me to be reasonable!" yelled Andy. "I been hearing all this talk about how you are blaming me for what you call hard luck. And I tell you to your face it ain't hard luck at all. It's plain downright shiftlessness and bad management. And if you think you're going to get anywhere with all this talk of yours, you are just plain crazy. You been taken in by a lot of alien nonsense. If I had my way, I'd run all those stinking aliens right the hell off the planet."

PA took a quick step forward and I thought he was about to clobber Andy. But Butch's Pa jumped forward and grabbed him by the arm.

"No! No!" he shouted. "There's no need to fight him! Let us go away!"

Pa stood there with Butch's Pa hanging to his arm, and I wondered for a minute which one he would

clobber, Butch's Pa or Andy.

"I never liked you," Andy said to Pa, "from the first day I saw you. I had you figured for a bum and that is what you are. And this taking up with aliens is the lowest thing any human ever did. You ain't no better than they are. Now get off this place and don't you ever dare set foot on it again."

Pa jerked his arm and sent Butch's Pa staggering to one side. Then he brought it up and back. I saw Andy's head start moving to one side, dropping over toward his shoulder, and for a second it looked like he had the beginning of two heads. And I knew that I was watching another accident beginning to unhappen, although it was no accident, for Pa sure meant to paste him.

But they weren't fast enough to get Andy's head tilted out of danger. They weren't dealing this time with a slowly sliding ladder.

There was a solid crack like someone had hit a tree with an axe on a frosty morning, and Andy's head jerked back and his feet came off the ground and he went tincup over teakettle, flat on his back.

And there were all those silly halflings standing in a row, with shocked looks upon their faces, as if they couldn't quite believe it. You could have bought the lot of them for no more than half a buck.

Pa turned around and held out his hand to me and said: "Come on, Steve. Let's go."

He said it in a quiet voice that was clear and level, and there was, I thought, a note of pride in it. And we turned around, the two of us, and we walked away from there, not hurrying any and not even looking back.

"I swear to God," said Pa, "I've meant to do that ever since I laid eyes on him fifteen years ago."

I hadn't noticed what had happened to Butch or to his Pa and I wondered where they might have gone to, for there wasn't hide nor hair of them. But I didn't say anything to Pa about it, for I had a hunch he might not be harboring exactly friendly feelings toward Butch's Pa.

BUT I needn't have worried about them, for when we got out to the road they were waiting for us, breathing kind of hard and considerably scratched up. The way they'd gone through that brush and all those blackberry patches must have been a caution.

"I am glad to see," said Butch's Pa, "that you got back safely."

"Don't mention it," Pa told him coldly, and went on down the road, hanging tight onto my hand so that I had to trot along.

We got back home and went into the kitchen to get a drink of water.

Pa said to me, "Steve, have you got those glasses?"

I dug them out of my pocket and handed them to him. He put them on the shelf above the washstand.

"Leave them there," he said. "Don't touch them again — not ever. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

To tell the truth, I would have liked it better if he'd gone ranting up and down. I was afraid that what had happened out there in the woods had made him decide to go to one of the Homestead Planets. I told myself he maybe already had made up his mind and didn't need to rant.

But he never said a word about the fight with Andy nor about the Homestead Planets and he wasn't sore at me. He kept on being quiet and I knew that he still was mad clean through and I figured that he was mostly sore at Butch and Butch's Pa for their having made a complete fool of him.

I did a lot of wondering about what I'd seen down there in Andy's hayfield. And the more I thought about it, the more I was convinced that I had grasped the secret of how the halflings operated.

For I must have been seeing in two different times when I'd been looking at the ladder. I must have looked into the future and seen the ladder slip. Except it

never slipped, for the halflings, seeing that it would slip, had made one leg of it settle in the ground. And then, with the ladder sitting solid, it never slipped, of course. The halflings had done no more than look ahead a bit and then righted something that was about to happen before it had a chance to happen.

AND that, I told myself, was the basis of good luck and bad. The halflings could spot disaster coming and try to head it off. Except they couldn't always make it. They had tried to protect Andy when Pa took a lick at him and they had failed. So I figured that they weren't infallible and that made me feel some better.

For if they could make good luck for Andy, it stood to reason they could make bad luck for the rest of us. All they had to do, if they had a mind to, was to see good luck heading for us and change it into bad.

It might even be possible, I told myself, that the halflings lived ahead of us, by a few seconds or so, and that the only thing which separated us from them was this matter of a different time.

But there was something else that troubled me a lot. Why had I been able to see two different times? It was clear to me that Butch and his people couldn't, for if they could, they'd have more

answers to the halfling situation. They'd been studying it for years, and so far as I could figure, they didn't know for certain about this two-time business.

It seemed to me, when I thought about it, that Butch's Pa might have ground better than he knew when he made my glasses. He might have put in something or taken out something or done something he didn't know about at all.

Or it might be that the human race had a different kind of vision, or maybe just a little different, and when you added the correction for Butch's kind of vision to our kind of vision, you brought out a thing you couldn't even guess at.

I tried and tried to get it clear within my mind, but I couldn't do it. I just went around in circles.

I stayed close to home for several days because I had a feeling that I should be ignoring Butch to uphold the family honor and that is how I missed the big hassle between Fancy Pants and Nature Boy.

It seems that Nature Boy got sick and tired of how Fancy Pants was mistreating that poor, bedraggled cat. So he took one member of the skunk family that had fallen in love with him and he clipped and dyed that skunk to look exactly like the cat. And one day he sneaked over to Fancy Pants' place and switched the

skunk for the cat without anyone seeing him.

The skunk didn't want to be Fancy Pants' skunk; he belonged to Nature Boy. So he started beating it back home as fast as he could go, which wasn't very fast.

Just then Fancy Pants floated out of the door and he saw the skunk going through the gate. He thought the cat was trying to sneak away from him, so he reached out and grabbed it up and rolled it into a ball and tossed it pretty high into the air, sort of careless like, to teach that cat a lesson.

It went up in the air and came down smack-dab on top of Fancy Pants, who was floating out there in the yard a few feet off the ground.

The skunk was scared witless. As soon as it got its claws fastened into Fancy Pants and had some leverage, it retaliated with enthusiasm. And for the first time in his life, Fancy Pants thumped down to the ground and, among other things, he got his clothes as dirty as any other kid.

I would give a zillion dollars to have seen it.

FOR a while, they figured that they might have to take Fancy Pants out somewhere and bury him for a week or two to make him presentable again. But they finally got him to a point where one could come near him.

Fancy Pants' Pa went storming down to talk with Nature Boy's Pa and the two of them put on a ruckus that had the neighborhood chuckling for a week.

And now I was really strapped for playmates. I was still cold-shouldering Butch and I knew better than to take up again with either Nature Boy or Fancy Pants. They both were mean cusses when they set their mind to it. I was sure we hadn't heard the last of this feud of theirs and I didn't want to get tangled up in it by being friends with either one of them.

It was plenty tough, let me tell you. Here I was with vacation almost ended and no one to pal around with and my live-it gone. I watched the days slip past and regretted every minute of it.

Then one day the sheriff drove up to the house.

Pa and I were out in the barnyard trying to tinker up a corn binder that was all tied together with haywire and other makeshift odds and ends. Pa had been threatening to buy one for a long time now, but with all the tough luck we'd been having, there wasn't any money.

"Good morning, Henry," the sheriff said to Pa.

Pa said good morning back.

"I hear you been having a little trouble with your neighbors," said the sheriff.

"Not what you would call real trouble," Pa told him. "I busted one in the snoot the other day is all."

"Right on his own farm, too."

Pa quit working on the binder and squatted back on his heels to look up at the sheriff. "Andy been around complaining?"

"He was in the other day. Said you had swallowed some fool story that this new alien family started. About some kind of bad-luck critters he'd been harboring on his farm."

"And you talked him out of it?"

"Well, now," said the sheriff, "I am a peaceable man and I hate to see two neighbors fighting. Andy wanted to put you under peace bond, but I said I'd come over and have a talk with you."

"All right," invited Pa. "Go ahead and talk."

"Now look here, Henry. You know the story about them hard-luck critters is so much poppycock. I'm surprised you took any stock in it."

Pa got up slowly. He had a hard look on his face and I thought for a minute he was about to bust the sheriff. I was scared, I tell you, for that is something no one should ever do — up and bust a sheriff.

I DON'T know what he might done or what he might have said, for at that moment Nature

Boy's Pa came tearing down the road in his old jalopy and pulled in behind the sheriff's car, intending to park there. But he miscalculated some and he smacked into the sheriff's car hard enough to skid it ahead six feet or so with the brakes all set.

The sheriff broke into a run. "By God!" he said. "It isn't even safe to drive out into this corner of the county!"

The two of us ran along behind him. I was running just because there was some excitement, but I figure maybe Pa was running so he could help Nature Boy's Pa if the sheriff should take it into his head to get feisty with him.

And the funny thing about it was that Nature Boy's Pa, instead of sitting there and waiting for the sheriff, had jumped out of his car and was running up the slope to meet us.

"They told me I'd find you here," he panted to the sheriff.

"You found me, all right," said the sheriff, practically breathing fire. "Now I'm going to—"

"My boy is gone!" yelled Nature Boy's Pa. "He wasn't home last night . . ."

The sheriff grabbed him and said to him: "Now let's take this easy. Tell me exactly what happened."

"He went off yesterday, early in the morning, and he didn't show

up for meals, but we didn't think too much of it—he often goes off for an entire day. He has a lot of friends out there in the woods."

"And he didn't come home last night?"

Nature Boy's Pa shook his head. "Along about dusk, we got worried. I went out and hunted for him and I didn't find him. I hunted all night long, but there wasn't any sign of him. I thought maybe he'd just holed up for the night with one of his friends in the woods. I thought maybe he'd show up when it got light, but he never did."

"Well, all right," said the sheriff, "you leave it to me. We'll rouse out all the neighbors and organize a hunt. We'll find him." He said to me: "You know the lad? You did some playing with him?"

"All the time," I answered.

"Lead us to all the places where you played. We'll look there first."

Pa said: "I'll start phoning the neighbors. I'll get them here right away."

He ran up the hill toward the house.

In an hour or less, there were a hundred people gathered and the sheriff took them all in hand. He divided them into posses and appointed captains for each posse and told them where to hunt.

It was the most excitement we've ever had in the neighborhood.

THE sheriff took me with the posse he headed up and we went down Dark Hollow. I took them to the place where we were digging out the lizard and the place where we had started to dig ourselves a cave and the hole in the creek where Nature Boy had made friends with some whopping trout, and some other places, too. We found some old tracks of Nature Boy's, but there was no fresh sign, although we hunted up and down the hollow clear to where it flowed into the river, and we trailed back come night, and I was tuckered out.

And a little scared as well.

For an awful suspicion had come to me.

And no matter how hard I tried to keep from thinking of it, I couldn't help myself, for all the time I was trying to remember if the hopper in that time machine had been big enough to take a kid the size of Nature Boy.

Ma fed me and sent me up to bed and later she came up and tucked me in and kissed me. She hadn't done that in years. She knew I was too big to be tucked in and kissed, but she did it anyhow.

And then she went downstairs and I lay there listening to some men who still were out there in the yard, talking among themselves. Some of the others still were hunting and I knew that I

should be out there hunting with them, but I knew Ma wouldn't let me go and I was glad of it. For I was tired all through and the woods at night can be a scary place.

I should by rights have gone straight to sleep. Any other night I would have. But I lay there thinking about that hopper in the time machine and I wondered how long it would take before someone told the sheriff about the ruckus between Fancy Pants and Nature Boy, and I thought perhaps they had already. And if so, the sheriff probably was looking into it right now, for the sheriff was nobody's fool.

I wondered if I should tell him myself if no one else had. But that was one fight I didn't have any hankering to get tangled up in.

Finally I went to sleep and it seemed to me I hadn't been asleep any time at all when something woke me up. It still was dark, but there was a red glow shining through the window. I sat up quick, with my hair standing half on end.

I thought at first it might be our barn or the machine shed, but then I saw it wasn't that close. I skinned out of bed and over to the window. That fire was a big one and it wasn't too far up the road.

It looked as if it was on the Carter place, but I knew that must

be wrong, for if bad luck like that struck anyone, it wouldn't be Andy Carter. Unless, of course, he was loaded with insurance.

I went downstairs in my bare feet and Ma was standing at the door, looking up the road toward the blaze.

"What is it, Ma?" I asked.

"It's the barn on the Carter place," she said. "They phoned the neighborhood for help, but all the men are out hunting Nature Boy."

We stood there, Ma and me, and watched until the blaze almost died out, and then Ma hiked me off to bed.

I CRAWLED underneath the covers, weak with this new excitement. I wondered why we should tag along for months with nothing happening, and then all at once have it busting out all over.

I lay there and thought about Andy Carter's barn and there was something wrong about it. Andy had been the luckiest man in seven counties and now, without any warning, he was having bad luck just like the rest of us.

I wondered if the halflings might have gone off and left him, and if that was the case, I wondered why they had. Maybe, I told myself, they had gotten plain disgusted with Andy's meanness.

It was broad daylight when I woke again and I jumped straight

out of bed and climbed into my clothes. I rushed downstairs to see if there was any word of Nature Boy.

Ma said there wasn't, that the men were still out hunting. She had breakfast ready for me and insisted I eat it and warned me about wandering off or trying to join one of the searching parties. She said it wasn't safe for me to be out in the woods with so many bears about. And that was funny, for she had never worried about the bears before.

But she made me promise I wouldn't.

As soon as I got out, I zipped down the road as fast as I could go. I had to see the place where the Carter barn had burned down and I just had to talk with someone. And Butch was the only one left that I could talk to.

There wasn't much to see at the Carter place, just burned and blackened timbers that still were smoking some. I stood out in the road a while and then I saw Andy come out of the house and he stood there for a minute looking straight at me. So I got out of there.

I went past Fancy Pants' place real fast, hoping I wouldn't see him. At the moment, I didn't want a thing to do with Fancy Pants.

When I got to Butch's place, his Ma told me he was sick in bed. She didn't think it was catching, she said, so I went up to see him.

Butch sure looked terrible lying there — more like a runty hoot owl than he ever had before — but he was glad to see me. I asked him how he was and he said he felt better. He made me promise I wouldn't tell his Ma, then told me that he'd got sick from eating some green apples he'd pinched off the Carter orchard.

He'd heard about Nature Boy and I told him in a whisper the suspicions I had.

He lay there looking at me solemnly and finally he said: "Steve, I should have told you this before. That is no time machine."

"No time machine? How do you know?"

"Because I saw the stuff that Fancy Pants' Pa put through it. It didn't go anywhere. It still is lying there."

"You saw . . ." And then I had it. "You mean it went to where the halfings are?"

"That's what I mean," said Butch.

SITTING there on edge of the bed, I tried to think it through, but there were so many questions bubbling up in me that I couldn't do it.

"Butch," I asked, "where is this place that the halfings are?"

"I don't know," said Butch. "It's close to us, almost in this world, but not really."

And I remembered something

Pa had said several weeks before. "You mean it's like a place behind a plate-glass window that's between our world and theirs?"

"Something like that."

"And if Nature Boy is there, what would happen to him?"

Butch shuddered. "I don't know."

"Would he be all right? Could he breathe in there?"

"I suppose he could," said Butch. "I think the halfings do."

I got up from the bed and started for the door. Then I turned back again.

"Butch, what are the halfings doing? What are they hanging around for?"

"No one's sure," said Butch. "There are a lot of ideas about what they are after. One is that they have to be near something that is living before they can live themselves. They can't live a life themselves; they've got to have a life to — well, like imitate, only that's not the word."

"They need a pattern," I said, remembering what Butch's Pa had said that day, before Pa choked him off with his own rambling about what the halfings might be after.

"I guess you could call it that," said Butch.

And I stood there thinking what a lousy life the halfings must have led, using Andy Carter as their pattern.

But that wasn't so, for the halfings, that time I had seen them,

had sure-God been happy. They'd been running around up there on the roof and keeping themselves busy and enjoying themselves.

And they had, every one of them, looked like Andy Carter. And of course they would, with Andy as their pattern.

Thinking about it, I could see how someone like Andy, with his kind of disposition, might enjoy being mean as dirt and ornery with his neighbors. He'd have a sense of independence and the feel of every hand being raised against him and him standing there like a mighty warrior, defying all of them. And from that he'd get a sense of strength and domination. All in all, I supposed, Andy, for a man like him, might be living a pretty darned satisfactory life.

I started for the door, and Butch called after me, "Where are you going, Steve?"

"I'm going to find Nature Boy," I said.

"I'll go with you."

"No, you stay in bed. Your Ma will skin both of us if you don't."

I got out of the house and headed fast for home, and as I ran, I kept on thinking about how the half-lings had no life of their own, but had to find another life and pattern themselves on it.

Sometimes they'd be mighty lucky and fasten onto someone who'd give them a good and exciting life, or maybe a good and con-

tented life, but other times they'd get a mighty poor one. But you had to say this for them — they gave all the help they could to the one they'd picked out as a pattern, and they kept working at it.

And I wondered how many persons who had been great successes might have been watched over by the half-lings. What an awful let-down it would be if they were to learn that they had not become great or rich or famous through any particular effort or brilliance of their own, but by the grace of a bunch of things that helped them from outside.

I GOT home and went into the kitchen and over to the sink.

"Is that you, Steve?" Ma called from the living room.

"I'm getting a drink," I told her.

"Where you been?"

"Just around."

"Now don't you go running off," she warned.

"No, ma'am, I won't."

And all the time I was talking to her, I was climbing on a chair so I could reach those glasses where Pa had put them on the shelf and told me not to touch them again — not ever.

Then I had them in my pocket and was climbing off the chair.

I heard Ma heading for the kitchen and I hurried out as quietly as I could.

I didn't put the glasses on until

I got to where the Carter farm cornered on the road, I went along the road, watching carefully, and finally I found a bunch of halflings down in a fence corner just beyond the orchard. They were standing there and squabbling over something and they didn't seem to notice me until I got real close.

Then they all swung around and stood facing me. They seemed to be talking among themselves and pointed at me.

And there on the head of one of them, pushed up on his forehead, was the live-it set I had lost down the time machine.

When I saw that, I realized Butch actually had seen the stuff that Fancy Pants' Pa had put through the time machine.

At first I don't think they realized that I could see them, but after I stood there for a while, staring at them, they began to move up closer to me.

I could feel the hair rearing right up on my head. There was nothing I wanted to do more than turn around and run. But I told myself they couldn't reach me and there was nothing to be scared of, so I stood on my ground.

They reminded me of a bunch of crows. They must have seen I didn't have a gun, or maybe this particular bunch didn't know about the guns Butch's people had. And they crowded up real close to me, like a flock of crows is not afraid

of an empty-handed man, but will keep their distance when he has a gun.

I could see their mouths moving at me, but naturally I couldn't hear a thing, and they kept pointing at the one that had my live-it on his head.

TO tell the honest truth, I didn't pay too close attention to what they might have been doing at the start of it. I was too busy looking at them and trying to figure out what might have happened to them. There was one thing certain — this either was a different bunch than I had seen down in Andy Carter's hay field or they had changed a lot. There was still some of Andy in them, although not as much of him as someone else, as if Andy and someone else had gotten sort of scrambled together.

Finally I made out that they were pointing at the one with the live-it on his head and then tapping their own heads, and I figured out that each of them was asking for a live-it, too.

I don't know what I would have said to them or how I would have said it, if I had had the chance, only I never had the chance. They suddenly parted, as if someone from behind had pushed them to one side, and there was Nature Boy, standing face to face with me.

We stood there and looked at one another for a good long time,

not saying anything, not making any motion. Then he stepped forward and I stepped forward until we were almost nose to nose. I was afraid there, for a moment, we'd walk right through each other. What would have happened then? Probably nothing much.

"You O.K.?" I asked him, thinking maybe he could read my lips even if he couldn't hear me, but he shook his head. So I asked him once again, talking slowly and forming my words as distinctly as I could. But he shook his head again.

Then I thought of something else.

I lifted up my hand and stuck out my finger and pretended I was writing on the imaginary window that separated us.

"YOU O.K.?" I wrote, taking it slow, because he'd have to read it backwards.

He didn't get it right away and I did it once again and this time he understood.

"O.K.," he wrote. And then he wrote real slow: "GET ME OUT!"

I stood there looking at him and it was horrible, for there he was and here I was, and so far as I could see, there was no way to get him out.

He must have sensed what I was thinking, because all at once his mouth trembled and that was the first time I'd even seen Nature Boy even close to crying. Not even that time when we were digging out the

lizard and a big rock fell on his toe.

I thought how bad it must have been for him, trapped in that place and able to see out, but knowing that no one could see in. He might even have followed some of the searching parties, hoping that someone might accidentally glimpse him, but knowing they couldn't. Maybe he had trailed along behind his Pa, as close as he could get to him, and his Pa not knowing it. And maybe he'd gone back home and watched his family and been all the lonelier for their not knowing he was there. And undoubtedly he'd hunted around for Butch, who he knew could see him, only Butch had been sick in bed.

And while I was thinking all of this, I got a faint idea. I told myself that it probably wouldn't work, but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed it might.

So I reached up with my finger and I wrote: "MEET ME AT FANCY PANTS."

I pocketed my glasses and hurried along home. I circled around the house because I didn't want to take the chance of Ma seeing me and not letting me go. I went into the machine shed and found a length of rope and hunted up a hacksaw.

Lugging these, I made my way back to Fancy Pants' place. The machine shed was back of the barn, so no one from the house could

see me, and anyhow no one seemed to be around. I knew that Fancy Pants' Pa, and maybe Fancy Pants himself, would be out with the searchers, floating around over places where it would be impossible for the men on foot to go.

I laid down the rope and hacksaw and put on my glasses and Nature Boy was there, right beside the machine shed door. He had some of the halfings with him, including the one who still had the live-it perched up on his forehead. And scattered all around the place, just like Butch had said, were tea cups and pie plates and children's blocks and a lot of other junk — the stuff that Fancy Pants' Pa had fed into the time machine.

I looked at the halfings again and all at once I knew what was different about them. They were still some of Andy, but they were Nature Boy as well. And then I knew why Andy's barn had burned. These halfings of his had been so busy tagging around Nature Boy that they had not been able to give Andy their attention.

It seemed only natural, of course. A halfling would get a lot more good out of a real live human inside that world of theirs than they would someone they could only see from behind a plate-glass window.

I took the glasses off and put them in my pocket and got to work. It was no easy job to saw

through that padlock. The steel was awfully hard and the blade was dull and I was afraid it might break before I got through the steel. I cursed myself for not thinking to bring along an extra blade or two.

The sawing made an awful racket because I had forgotten to bring along some oil to squirt into the cut. But nobody heard the sawing.

Finally I got through.

I opened the door and stepped into the shed and the time machine was there, just the way I remembered it. I laid down the rope and went over to the control board and studied it, but it wasn't very complicated.

I got it turned on and the creamy whirlpool was sliding in the hopper's throat.

I picked up the rope and put my glasses on and got an awful fright. The machine shed was built on a gentle slope and the floor I was standing on was four or five feet above the ground and there I was, standing in the air, or so it seemed to me.

I had a sense, not of falling, but that by rights I should be falling, that any minute now I would begin to fall. I knew I wouldn't, naturally — I was standing on a transparent but solid floor. But knowing that didn't help much. That horrible, dreamlike feeling that I was about to tumble to the ground still kept hold of me.

And to make it even worse, there was Nature Boy, standing underneath me, with his head about level with my feet, looking up at me. His face was hopeful and he was motioning me to get busy with the rope.

MOVING cautiously, even if there was no need of caution, I took one end of the rope and tossed it down the hopper and felt the suck and tug of the creamy whirlpool pulling down the rope. Down underneath the hopper, I could see the rope coming out, dangling into that place where Nature Boy was trapped. He moved over quickly and grabbed hold of the rope and I could feel the weight of the pull he put on it.

Nature Boy was about my size, perhaps a little smaller, and I knew I'd have to pull as hard as ever I could to get him out of there. I even wound a hitch around my hand to make sure it wouldn't slip. I pulled with all my might. And that rope didn't budge. It felt as if I were pulling against a house. I couldn't gain an inch.

So I quit pulling and knelt down, still hanging to the rope, peering at the base of the time machine.

It was a funny thing. The rope went to the bottom of the hopper's throat and then it skipped a foot or two. There was a foot or so of sidewise space where there wasn't

any rope, and then the rope took up again, dangling down into that other place where Nature Boy had hold of it.

It didn't make sense. That rope should have gone into that other world in a straight and simple line. But the fact was that it didn't. It went off somewhere else before it fell into the other world.

And that, I figured, was the reason I couldn't pull it out.

You could put a thing through the time machine, but you couldn't pull it back.

I looked down at Nature Boy and he looked back at me. I knew he'd seen it and knew as well as I did exactly what it meant. He looked pretty pitiful and I don't suppose I looked any better.

Just then the machine shed door screeched open.

I jumped up, still hanging to the rope, and there was Fancy Pants' Pa.

He was all burned up and I couldn't blame him. Not after seeing how I had sawed the padlock to break into the place.

"Steve," he said, and you could hear him fighting to keep his voice level, "I thought I told you to keep out of here."

"Yes, sir," I said, "but Nature Boy's in there."

"Nature Boy!" he shouted. Then his voice dropped. "You don't know what you're talking about. How could he get in?"

"I don't know," I said, though I could have told him.

"Those glasses you are wearing," asked Fancy Pants' Pa. "Are those the ones that were made for you by Butch's father?"

I nodded.

"Then you can see?"

"I can see Nature Boy," I said. "Just as plain as day."

I LET go of the rope to take my glasses off and the rope slid down that hopper slicker than a whistle.

"It's all right, I guess," I said. "I couldn't pull him out."

"Steve," said Fancy Pants' Pa, "I want you to tell me the truth. You're not just thinking up a story? You are not pretending?"

He was awful pale and I saw what he was thinking — if Nature Boy had gone down that hopper, the entire neighborhood would be down on him like a ton of bricks.

I crossed my heart. "And hope to die," I added.

That seemed good enough for him.

He shut off the time machine, then went outdoors. I followed him.

"Now," he said, "you stay right here. I'll be back immediately."

He floated off in somewhat of a hurry, zooming away above the pasture woods. He was out of sight in no time.

I sat down with my back against the machine shed and I was feeling

pretty low. I knew I should put on my glasses, but I kept them in my pocket. I couldn't have stood the sight of Nature Boy looking out at me.

It was done and over with, I knew. There was no way in the world for me or anyone to rescue Nature Boy. He was gone for good and all. He was worse than gone.

And sitting there, I thought up some pretty dreadful things to do to Fancy Pants. For there was no doubt in my mind that Fancy Pants had got into the shed and had grabbed Nature Boy, just like he did the cat, and dumped him down the hopper.

He was pretty sore, I knew, about the trick that Nature Boy had played on him with that skunk disguised as a cat. There was nothing he would have stopped at to get even.

I was sitting there and thinking when Fancy Pants' Pa came floating up the road, and panting along behind him were Pa and the sheriff and Butch's Pa and Nature Boy's Pa and some other neighbors.

The sheriff came straight for me and he grabbed me by the shoulders and gave me a good, sharp shake.

"Now," he bellowed, "what is all this foolishness? I warn you, boy, it will go hard with you if you've been pulling our leg."

I tried to break away from him, but he wouldn't let me go. Then Pa

stepped up and flung out his arm so that it caught the sheriff straight across the chest and sent him staggering back.

"You keep your hands off him," Pa said to the sheriff.

"But that story," blustered the sheriff. "You surely don't believe—"

"I do," said Pa. "I believe every word of it. My boy doesn't lie."

I'll say this for Pa: He may storm around and yell and he may take the strap to you for a lot of trifling things, but when it comes down to the pinch, he's standing there beside you.

"I'll remind you, Henry," said the sheriff, bristling, "that you're not entirely in the clear yourself. There's that business of the breach of peace I talked Andy Carter out of."

"Andy Carter," said Pa, speaking more slowly than one would expect him to. "He's the man who lives just down the road, if I recall correctly. Has there been any of you who have seen him lately?"

HE looked around the crowd and it seemed that no one had.

"Last time I talked to Andy," said Pa, "was when I called him on the phone and told him we needed help. He said he was too busy to go hunting any alien whelp. He said it would be good riddance if all of them got lost."

He looked around the crowd and no one spoke a word. I don't sup-

NO LIFE OF THEIR OWN

pose it was quite polite of Pa to say what he had, with Nature Boy's Pa and Butch's Pa and all the rest of those alien people standing there before us. But it sure-God was the truth, and they needed it right then, and Pa was the one who was not afraid to give it to them right between the eyes.

Then someone spoke up from the crowd and there were so many of them I couldn't be sure exactly who it was. But whoever it was said: "I tell you, folks, it was nothing but plain justice when Andy's barn burned down."

The sheriff bristled up. "If I thought one of you had a hand in that, I would—"

"You wouldn't do a thing," said Pa. He turned to me. "All right, Steve, tell us what you have to tell. I promise you that everyone will listen and there won't be any interruptions."

He looked straight at the sheriff when he was saying it.

"Just a second, sir," said Butch's Pa. "I want to voice one important point. I know this boy can see the halfings, for I myself am the one who made the glasses for him. I know it is immodest of me to say a thing like this, but if I am nothing else, I am one fine optician."

"Thank you, sir," Pa said. "And now, Steve, go ahead."

But I never got a chance to say a single word, for Butch came stumbling around the barn and he had

the gun with him. Or at least I took it for the gun, although it didn't look like one. It was a sticklike thing and it glittered in the sunlight from all sorts of prisms and mirrors set into it at all kinds of crazy angles.

"Pa," yelled Butch, "I heard about it and I brought the gun. I hope I'm not too late."

He ran up to his Pa and his Pa took the gun away from him and held it with everyone looking at him.

"Thank you, son," said Butch's Pa. "It was good of you, but we won't need a gun. We aren't shooting anything today."

Then Butch cried out: "There he is, Pa! There's Nature Boy!"

I am not too sure that all of them believed I had found Nature Boy. Some might have had their reservations, and kept quiet about it because they didn't want to tangle with my Pa. But Butch was a different matter. He could see these things without any silly glasses. And he was an alien, and everyone expected aliens to do these sort of crazy things.

"All right," admitted the sheriff, "so I guess he must be there. Now what do we do?"

"There doesn't seem to be much to go on," said Pa, "but we can't leave the boy in there." He looked at Nature Boy's Pa. "Don't you worry. We'll figure a way to get him out."

But he spoke with so much confidence that I knew he was only talking so that Nature Boy's Pa would know we weren't giving up.

PERSONALLY, I could see no hope. If you couldn't get him out the way he had gotten in, there didn't seem to be any other way. There were no doors into that other place.

"Gentlemen," said Butch's Pa, "I have a small idea."

We all turned and waited.

"This gun," he said, "is used to keep down the number of halfings. It ruptures the wall between the two worlds sufficiently to let a bullet through. There might be an adaptation made of it, and we can do that later, or have someone do it for us, if that be necessary. But it seems possible to me we could use the gun itself."

"But we don't want to shoot the boy," the sheriff protested. "What we want to do is get him out."

"I have no intention, sir, of shooting him. There will be no bullet in the gun. All we'll use is the device to rupture the curtain or whatever it may be that lies between the worlds. And I can—what is the word? — tinker, I believe. I can tinker up the gun so that rupture will be greater."

He sat down on the ground and began working on the gun, shifting prisms here and there and adjusting tiny mirrors.

"There is just one thing," he said. "The rupture will last for but a moment. The boy must be immediate to take advantage of it. He must leap outward instantly the rupture should appear."

He turned to me. "Steve, can you communicate with him?"

"Communicate?"

"Talk to him. With signs, perhaps? Or the reading of the lips? Or some other way?"

"Sure, I can do that."

"Please, would you do it then?"

So I put on my glasses and looked around until I found Nature Boy. I had quite a time making him understand what we planned to do. It wasn't any easier to talk with him with all those crazy half-lings standing all around him and making motions at me and pointing at the live-it, then tapping their own heads.

I was sweating plenty, for I was afraid that I had not got it all across to him, but I knew that any more of it would do no more than confuse him.

So I told Butch's Pa that we were all set, and Butch's Pa handed Butch the gun, and the rest stepped back a ways, and there was Butch with the gun and me standing right behind him. And there was Nature Boy standing in that other place, and a bunch of those silly half-lings clustered all about him, and they sure didn't know about the alien gun or they'd not have been stand-

ing there. And Nature Boy looked like someone who'd been stood against a wall and was being executed without even any blindfold.

Out of the tail of my eye, I saw Fancy Pants floating off to one side of us, and he was the saddest-looking sack you ever saw.

Suddenly there was a strange white flash of brilliance as all the prisms and the mirrors moved on the gun that Butch was holding. He had pulled a trigger, or whatever it was.

FOR a second, straight in front of us, a funny sort of hole seemed to open up in the place that should not have been there at all — a jagged, ragged hole that appeared in nothingness. And I caught sight of Nature Boy jumping through the hole the second it stayed open.

And there he was, staggering a bit from the jump that he had made — only he was not alone. He had one of the half-lings with him!

He had him by the wrist in a good tight grip and it was plain to see that he had jerked him through with him, for the halfling did not seem at all happy about what had happened to him. I saw at once that it was the halfling who had the live-it on his head.

Butch pushed the halfling toward me and he said: "Here, Steve. It was the only way I could get your live-it back."





I saw that Butch was letting go of the halfling and I grabbed quick by the other wrist and was somewhat surprised to find that he was solid. I would not have been astonished if my hand had gone right through him, for he still had that swirly-smoky look about him, although it seemed to me he might be hardening up a bit and becoming more substantial.

Pa moved over close beside me, saying, "You be careful, Steve!"

"Aw, he's all right," I said. "He's not even trying to get away from me."

Someone raised a shout and I whirled around and stared.

A half-dozen of the halflings had grabbed hold of the edges of that door into the other world, and they were tugging for dear life so it would stay open, and pouring out of it was that entire herd of halflings! They were shoving and pushing and scrambling to get through, and there were a lot more of them, it seemed to me, than I had thought there were.

We just stood there and watched them until they all were through. We didn't do a thing because there was not a thing we could do. And they stood there in a bunch, packed tight together, staring back at us.

The sheriff came alongside Pa. He pushed back his hat until it roosted on his neck. You could see that the sheriff was flabbergasted and I enjoyed it, for it had been

apparent from the very first that the sheriff hadn't believed a word he'd heard about the halflings.

I don't know, maybe he still was thinking that it might be nothing but some sort of alien joke. You could see, without half trying, that the sheriff didn't cotton to any aliens.

"How come," he asked suspiciously, "that this one here has got a live-it on?"

So I told him and he blinked at me, dazed and dumfounded, but he said nothing back. I sure had shut him up.

Fancy Pants' Pa had floated up while I was telling it and he said I told the truth, for he'd been there and seen it.

Everyone began to talk at once, but Fancy Pants' Pa floated up a little higher and held up his hand to command attention.

"Just a moment, if you please," he said. "Before we get down to more serious business, I have something you must hear. As you may suspect, knowing the episode of the skunk, my family undoubtedly has a great deal to answer for in this incident."

A HUMAN saying things like that would sound silly and pompous, but Fancy Pants' Pa could get away with it.

"So," said Fancy Pants' Pa, "I now announce to you that my malefactor son, for the forthcoming

thirty days, must walk upon his feet. He must not float an inch. If the punishment does not seem sufficient—"

"It's enough," Pa cut in. "The boy has to learn his lesson, but there is no use being harsh with him."

"Now, sir," said Nature Boy's Pa, being very formal, "it is not necessary—"

"I insist," Fancy Pants' Pa said. "I really must insist. It can be no other way."

"Say," bawled the sheriff, "will someone explain to me what this is all about?"

"Sheriff," Pa said to him, "your understanding of this matter is of no great importance and it would take too long to explain. We have more important business we should be attending to." He turned around a bit so he faced the crowd. "Well, gentlemen, what do we do next? It appears to me that we have some guests. And remembering that these critters are bearers of good luck, it would seem to me we should treat them as kindly as we can."

"Pa," I said, tugging at his coat sleeve, "I know how we can get them over on our side. Every one of them wants a live-it set."

"That's right," spoke up Nature Boy. "All the time I was in there, they pestered me and pestered me about how to get the sets. All the time they squabbled over who

would get to use Steve's set next."

"You mean," the sheriff asked, in a weak voice, "that these things can talk?"

"Why, sure they can," said Nature Boy. "They learn a lot more back in that world of theirs than you could ever guess."

"Well, now," Pa said with a lot of satisfaction, "if that is all they want, it's not too great a price for us to pay to get us some good luck. We'll just buy a lot of live-it sets. We can probably get them wholesale—"

"But if we get the live-its," objected Butch's Pa, "they'll just lie around and use them and be of no help to us at all. They won't need us any more. They'll have all these patterns they need from the live-it sets."

"Well, anyhow," said Pa, "even if that should be true, we'll get them off our necks. They won't pester us with this bad luck they commit."

"It won't do us any good however you look at it," declared Butch's Pa, who had a mighty low opinion of the halflings. "They all live together. That's the way it's always been. They never helped an entire neighborhood, but just one man or family in the neighborhood. A whole tribe of them comes in and they give one family all the benefit. You couldn't get them to split up and work for all of us."

"If you jerks would listen," said the halfling with the live-it on his

head, "I can get you straightened out."

It was a shock, I tell you, to hear him speak at all. He was the kind of thing you'd figure shouldn't speak at all — just a sort of dummy. And the way he spoke and the tone he used made it even worse. It was the way Andy Carter always talked — either wild and blustering, or out of the corner of his mouth, sarcastic. After listening to Andy all these years, that poor halfling didn't know any different.

EVERYONE just stood there, staring at the halfling who had spoken, while all the other halflings were nodding their heads in such mad agreement with him that I thought they'd snap their necks.

Pa was the first one to get his feet back under him.

"Go ahead," he said to the halfling. "We all are listening."

"We'll make a deal with you," said the halfling, using ornery words but speaking most respectful, "but you'll have to level with us, see? We'll work hard for you and guard against mishap, but we got to have the live-its and no mistake about it. One for each of us — and if I was you, mister, I wouldn't try to chisel."

"Well, now," said Pa, "that sounds fair enough. But you mean all of us?"

"All of you," the live-it halfling said.

"You mean you will split up?" asked Pa. "Each of us will have at least one of you? You won't all live together any more?"

"I think, sir," said Fancy Pants' Pa, "that we can depend on that. I believe I understand what this gentleman is thinking. It is something that happened with the human race on Earth."

"What happened here on Earth?" asked Pa, sort of flabbergasted.

"Why," said Fancy Pants' Pa, "the elimination of the need for social clustering. There was a time when the human race found it necessary to congregate in families and tribes for companionship and entertainment. Then the race got the record player and the radio and TV and there was less need for get-togethers. A man had entertainment of his own in his home. He need not move beyond his living room to be entertained. So the spectator and group sports simply petered out."

"And you think," asked Pa, "that the same thing will happen with the halflings if we gave them live-its?"

"Certainly," said Fancy Pants' Pa. "We supply them, as it were, entertainment for the home, personal entertainment. There will be no further need for tribal living."

"You said it, pal!" the halfling said enthusiastically.

All the rest of them were nodding in agreement.

“BUT it’s still no good,” yelled Butch’s Pa, getting real riled up. “They’re in this world now, and how do you get them back? And while they’re here, can they do anything for us?”

“You can stop shooting off your mouth right now,” the halfling said to Butch’s Pa with utmost respect. “We can’t do anything here for you, that’s sure. In this world of yours, we can’t see ahead. And to do you any good, we have to see ahead.”

“You mean that if we give you live-its, you’ll go back home again?” asked Pa.

“Sure,” said the halfling. “Back there is our home. Just try to keep us from it.”

“We won’t even try,” Pa said. “We might even push you back. We’ll give you the live-its and you get back there and start to work for us.”

“We’ll work for you hard,” said the halfling, “but not all the time.

We take out some time for looking at the live-it. That all right with you?”

“Sure,” Pa agreed. “Sure, that’s O.K. with us.”

“All right,” said the halfling, “get us back where we belong.”

I turned around and walked out of the crowd, out to the edge of it. For it was all settled now and I had a belly full of it. It would be all right with me if we never had any more excitement in the neighborhood.

Up by the barn, I saw Fancy Pants limping along on the ground. He was having a tough time walking. But I didn’t feel the least bit sorry for him. He had it coming.

I figured in just a little while I’d go up around the barn and clobber him for that time he mopped up the road with me.

It should be an easy job, I told myself, with him grounded by his Pa for thirty days.

—CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

In The Next Issue

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME, a novella by Christopher Grimm — in hideous hyperspace, everything is the nightmare opposite of itself . . . yet here is where Len Mattern finds his goal!

Citizen Jell

By MICHAEL SHAARA

*The problem with working wonders
is they must be worked — even when
they're against all common sense!*

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

NONE of his neighbors knew Mr. Jell's great problem. None of his neighbors, in truth, knew Mr. Jell at all. He was only an odd old man who lived alone in a little house on the riverbank. He had the usual little mail box, marked "E. Jell," set on a post in front of his house, but he never got any mail, and it was not long before

people began wondering where he got the money he lived on.

Not that he lived well, certainly; all he ever seemed to do was just fish, or just sit on the riverbank watching the sky, telling tall stories to small children. And none of that took any money to do.

But still, he was a little odd; people sensed that. The stories he told all his young friends, for in-

stance — wild, weird tales about spacemen and other planets—people hardly expected tales like that from such an old man. Tales about cowboys and Indians they might have understood, but spaceships?

So he was definitely an odd old man, but just how odd, of course, no one ever really knew. The stories he told the children, stories about space travel, about weird creatures far off in the Galaxy—those stories were all true.

Mr. Jell was, in fact, a retired spaceman.

Now that was part of Mr. Jell's problem, but it was not all of it. He had very good reasons for not telling anybody the truth about himself — no one except the children — and he had even more excellent reasons for not letting his own people know where he was.

The race from which Mr. Jell had sprung did not allow this sort of thing — retirement to Earth. They were a fine, tolerant, extremely advanced people, and they had learned long ago to leave undeveloped races, like the one on Earth, alone. Bitter experience had taught them that more harm than good came out of giving scientific advances to backward races, and often just the knowledge of their existence caused trouble among primitive peoples.

No, Mr. Jell's race had for a long while quietly avoided contact with planets like Earth, and

if they had known Mr. Jell had violated the law, they would have come swiftly and taken him away—a thing Mr. Jell would have died rather than let happen.

MR. Jell was unhuman, yes, but other than that he was a very gentle, usual old man. He had been born and raised on a planet so overpopulated that it was one vast city from pole to pole. It was the kind of place where a man could walk under the open sky only on rooftops, where vacant lots were a mark of incredible wealth. Mr. Jell had passed most of his long life under unbelievably cramped and crowded conditions—either in small spaceships or in the tiny rooms of unending apartment buildings.

When Mr. Jell had happened across Earth on a long voyage some years ago, he had recognized it instantly as the place of his dreams. He had had to plan very carefully, but when the time came for his retirement, he was able to slip away. The language of Earth was already on record; he had no trouble learning it, no trouble buying a small cottage on the river in a lovely warm place called Florida. He settled down quietly, a retired old man of one hundred and eighty-five, looking forward to the best days of his life.

And Earth turned out to be more wonderful than his dreams.

He discovered almost immediately that he had a great natural aptitude for fishing, and though the hunting instinct had been nearly bred out of him and he could no longer summon up the will to kill, still he could walk in the open woods and marvel at the room, the incredible open, wide, and unoccupied room, live animals in a real forest, and the sky above, clouds seen through the trees — *real trees*, which Mr. Jell had seldom seen before. And, for a long while, Mr. Jell was certainly the happiest man on Earth.

He would arise, very early, to watch the sun rise. After that, he might fish, depending on the weather, or sit home just listening to the lovely rain on the roof, watching the mighty clouds, the lightning. Later in the afternoon, he might go for a walk along the riverbank, waiting for school to be out so he could pass some time with the children.

Whatever else he did, he would certainly go looking for the children.

A lifetime of too much company had pushed the need for companionship pretty well out of him, but then he had always loved children, and they made his life on the river complete. They *believed* him; he could tell them his memories in safety, and there was something very special in that, to have secrets with friends. One or two of them,

the most trustworthy, he even allowed to see the Box.

Now the Box was something extraordinary, even to so advanced a man as Mr. Jell. It was a device which analyzed matter, made a record of it, and then duplicated it. The Box could duplicate anything.

What Mr. Jell would do, for example, would be to put a loaf of bread into the Box, and press a button, and presto, there would be *two* loaves of bread, each perfectly alike, atom for atom. It would be absolutely impossible for anyone to tell them apart. This was the way Mr. Jell made most of his food, and all of his money. Once he had gotten one original dollar bill, the Box went on duplicating it — and bread, meat, potatoes, anything else Mr. Jell desired was instantly available at the touch of a button.

ONCE the Box duplicated a thing, anything, it was no longer necessary to have the original. The Box filed a record in its electronic memory, describing, say, bread, and Mr. Jell had only to dial a number any time he wanted bread. And the Box needed no fuel except dirt, leaves, old pieces of wood, just anything made out of atoms — most of which it would arrange into bread or meat or whatever Mr. Jell wanted, and the rest of which it would use as a source of power.

So the Box made Mr. Jell entirely independent, but it did even more than that; it had one other remarkable feature. It could be used also as a transmitter and receiver. Of matter. It was, in effect, the Sears Roebuck catalogue of Mr. Jell's people, with its own built-in delivery service.

If there was an item Mr. Jell needed, any item at all, and that item was available on any of the planets ruled by Mr. Jell's people, Mr. Jell could dial for it, and it would appear in the Box in a matter of seconds.

The makers of the Box prided themselves on the speed of their delivery, the ease with which they could transmit matter instantaneously across light-years of space. Mr. Jell admired this property, too, but he could make no use of it. For once he had dialed, he would also be billed. And of course his Box would be traced to Earth. That Mr. Jell could not allow.

No, he would make do with whatever was available on Earth. He had to get along without the catalogue.

And he really never needed the catalogue, not at least for the first year, which was perhaps the finest year of his life. He lived in perfect freedom, ever-continuing joy, on the riverbank, and made some special friends: one Charlie, aged five, one Linda, aged four, one Sam, aged six. He spent a great

deal of his time with these friends, and their parents approved of him happily as a free baby-sitter, and he was well into his second year on Earth when the first temptation arose.

Bugs.

Try as he might, Mr. Jell could not learn to get along with bugs. His air-conditioned, antiseptic, neat and odorless existence back home had been an irritation, yes, but he had never in his life learned to live with bugs of any kind, and he was too old to start now. But he had picked an unfortunate spot. The state of Florida was a heaven for Mr. Jell, but it was also a heaven for bugs.

There is probably nowhere on Earth with a greater variety of insects, large and small, winged and stinging, than Florida, and the natural portion of all kinds found their ways into Mr. Jell's peaceful existence. He was unable even to clear out his own house — never mind the endless swarms of mosquitoes that haunted the riverbank — and the bugs gave him some very nasty moments. And the temptation was that he alone, of all people on Earth, could have exterminated the bugs at will.

One of the best-selling export gadgets on Mr. Jell's home world was a small, flying, burrowing, electronic device which had been built specifically to destroy bugs on planets they traded with. Mr.



Jell was something of a technician, and he might not even have had to order a Destroyer through the catalogue, but there were other problems.

MR. Jell's people had not been merely capricious when they formed their policy of non-intervention. Mr. Jell's bug-destroyer would kill all the bugs, but it would undoubtedly ruin the biological balance upon which the country's animal life rested. The birds which fed on the bugs would die, and the animals which fed on the birds, and so on, down a course which could only be disastrous. And even one of the little Destroyers would put an extraordinary dent in the bug population of the area; once sent out into the woods, it could not be recalled or turned off, and it would run for years.

No, Mr. Jell made the valiant decision to endure little itchy bumps on his arms for the rest of his days.

Yet that was only the first temptation. Soon there were others, much bigger and more serious. Mr. Jell had never considered this problem at all, but he began to realize at last that his people had been more right than he knew. He was in the uncomfortable position of a man who can do almost anything, and does not dare do it. A miracle man who must hide his miracles.

The second temptation was rain. In the middle of Mr. Jell's second year, a drought began, a drought which covered all of Florida. He sat by helplessly, day after day, while the water level fell in his own beloved river, and fish died gasping breaths, trapped in little pockets upstream. Several months of that produced Mr. Jell's second great temptation. Lakes and wells were dry all over the country, farms and orange groves were dry, there were great fires in the woods, birds and animals died by the thousands.

All that while, of course, Mr. Jell could easily have made it rain. Another simple matter, although this time he would have had to send away for the materials, through the Box. But he couldn't do that. If he did, *they* would come for him, and he consoled himself by arguing that he had no right to make it rain. That was not strictly controllable, either. It might rain and rain for several days, once started, filling up the lakes, yes, and robbing water from somewhere else, and then what would happen when the normal rainy season came?

Mr. Jell shuddered to think that he might be the cause, for all his good intentions, of vast floods, and he resisted the second temptation. But that was relatively easy. The third temptation turned out to be infinitely harder.

Little Charlie, aged five, owned a dog, a grave, sober, studious dog named Oscar. On a morning near the end of Mr. Jell's second year, Oscar was run over by a truck. And Charlie gathered the dog up, all crumpled and bleeding and already dead, and carried him tearfully but faithfully off to Mr. Jell, who could fix *anything*.

And Mr. Jell could certainly have fixed Oscar. Hoping to guard against just such an accident, he had already made a "recording" of Oscar several months before. The Box had scanned Oscar and discovered exactly how he was made — for the Box, as has been said, could duplicate anything—and Mr. Jell had only to dial Oscar number to produce a new Oscar. A live Oscar, grave and sober, atom for atom identical with the Oscar that was dead.

BUT young Charlie's parents, who had been unable to comfort the boy, came to Mr. Jell's house with him. And Mr. Jell had to stand there, red-faced and very sad, and deny to Charlie that there was anything he could do, and watch the look in Charlie's eyes turn into black betrayal. And when the boy ran off crying, Mr. Jell had the worst temptation of all.

He thought so at the time, but he could not know that the dog had not been the worst. The worst was yet to come.

He resisted a great many temptations after that, but now for the first time doubt had begun to seep in to his otherwise magnificent existence. He swore to himself that he could never give this life up. Here on the riverbank, dry and buggy as it well was, was still the most wonderful life he had ever known, infinitely preferable to the drab crowds he would face at home. He was an old man, grimly aware of the passage of time. He would consider himself the luckiest of men to be allowed to die and be buried here.

But the temptations went on.

First there was the Red Tide, a fish-killing disease which often sweeps Florida's coast, murdering fish by the hundreds of millions. He could have cured that, but he would have had to send off for the chemicals.

Next there was an infestation of the Mediterranean fruit fly, a bug which threatened most of Florida's citrus crop and very nearly ruined little Linda's father, a farmer. There was a Destroyer available which could be set to kill just one type of bug, Mr. Jell knew, but he would have had to order it, again, from the catalogue. So he had to let Linda's father lose most of his life's savings.

Shortly after that, he found himself tempted by a young, gloomy couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Ridge, whom he visited one day looking

for their young son, and found himself in the midst of a morbid quarrel. Mr. Ridge's incredible point of view was that this was too terrible a world to bring children into. Mr. Jell found himself on the verge of saying that he himself had personally visited forty-seven other worlds, and not one could hold a candle to this one.

He resisted that, at last, but it was surprising how close he had come to talking, even over such a relatively small thing as that, and he had concluded that he was beginning to wear under the strain, when there came the day of the last temptation.

Linda, the four-year-old, came down with a sickness. Mr. Jell learned with a shock that everyone on Earth believed her incurable.

HE had no choice then. He knew that from the moment he heard of the illness, and he wondered why he had never until that moment anticipated this. There was, of course, nothing else he could do, much as he loved this Earth, and much as he knew little Linda would certainly have died in the natural order of things. All of that made no difference; it had finally come home to him that if a man is able to help his neighbors and does not, then he ends up something less than a man.

He went out on the riverbank and thought about it all that after-

noon, but he was only delaying the decision. He knew he could not go on living here or anywhere with the knowledge of the one small grave for which he would be forever responsible. He knew Linda would not begrudge him those few moments, that one afternoon more. He waited, watching the sun go down, and then he went back into the house and looked through the catalogue. He found the number of the serum and dialed for it.

The serum appeared within less than a minute. He took it out of the Box and stared at it, the thought of the life it would bring to Linda driving all despair out of his mind. It was a universal serum; it would protect her from all disease for the rest of her life. They would be coming for him soon, but he knew it would take them a while to get here, perhaps even a full day. He did not bother to run. He was much too old to run and hide.

He sat for a while thinking of how to get the serum to her, but that was no problem. Her parents would give her anything she asked now, and he made up some candy, injecting the serum microscopically into the chunks of chocolate, and then suddenly had a wondrous idea. He put the chunks into the Box and went on duplicating candy until he had several boxes.

When he was finished with that, he went visiting all the houses of

all the good people he knew, leaving candy for them and their children. He knew he should not do that, but, he thought, it couldn't really do much harm, could it? Just those few lives altered, out of an entire world?

But the idea had started wheels turning in his mind, and toward the end of that night, he began to chuckle with delight. Might as well be flashed for a rogg as a zilb.

He ordered out one special little bug Destroyer, from the Box, set to kill just one bug, the medfly, and sent it happily down the road toward Linda's farm. After that, he duplicated Oscar and sent the dog yelping homeward with a note on his collar. When he was done with that, he ordered a batch of chemicals, several tons of it, and ordered a conveyer to carry it down and dump it into the river, where it would be washed out to sea and so end the Red Tide.

By the time that was over, he was very tired; he had been up the whole night. He did not know

what to do about young Mr. Ridge, the one who did not want children. He decided that if the man was that foolish, nothing could help him. But there was one other thing he could do. Praying silently that once he started this thing, it would not get out of hand, he made it rain.

In this way, he deprived himself of the last sunrise. There was nothing but gray sky, misty, blowing, when he went out onto the riverbank that morning. But he did not really mind. The fresh air and the rain on his face were all the good-by he could have asked for. He was sitting on wet grass wondering the last thought — why in God's name don't more people here realize what a beautiful world this is?—when he heard a voice behind him.

The voice was deep and very firm.

"Citizen Jell," it said.

The old man sighed.

"Coming," he said, "coming."

—MICHAEL SHAARA

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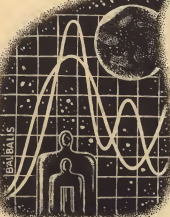
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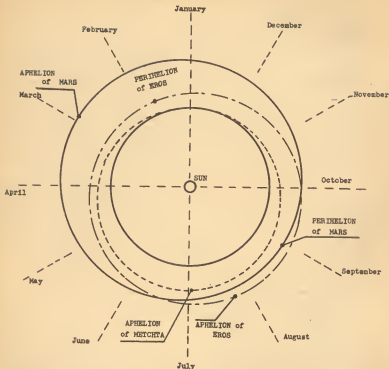
BY WILLY LEY

ORBIT AROUND THE SUN

THE question that came most frequently to me during January and the early part of February, by mail, by phone and in person after lectures, was one that surprised me very much. It was usually phrased as follows: "How do we know that the Russian rocket which missed the Moon is *really* in orbit around the Sun?" The answer I gave was more or less that the Russian rocket had to be in orbit around the Sun because it had no choice.



DIRECTION OF MOTION OF
ALL FOUR BODIES :



Orbits of Earth (inner solid circle) and of Mars (outer solid circle) as well as those of minor planet 433-Eros (dot-dash line) and rocket Matchta (broken line). Dotted lines with names of months on them indicate position of Earth on first day of every month.

Most of the time, a blank stare was all I got for this answer, but occasionally somebody wanted to know why the rocket did not melt from the heat if it was in orbit around the Sun.

Careful cross-questioning made it clear to me that the people who wondered what would happen to the rocket in orbit around the Sun had something like a tight orbit in mind. Also, some seem to have

been honestly convinced, incredible as it may sound, that the Moon and the Sun are both far from the Earth in space, but that they are pretty close to each other.

The whole story obviously needs some explanation and clarification. Probably all readers of *GALAXY* do not need the explanation itself, but they can use this column as ammunition if they have to explain the whole thing to others.

The explanation has to begin with a few simple figures about the orbit of the Earth. Most books state that the mean distance of the Earth from the Sun is 93 million miles, which is correct, provided the little word "mean" is not overlooked. In reality, the distance varies from 91.5 million miles at perihelion to 94.5 million miles at aphelion. Our Earth goes through perihelion (the point of its orbit closest to the Sun) very early in January, while the aphelion (the point farthest from the Sun) is passed very early in July of each year. The *mean* orbital velocity of the Earth is 18.5 miles per second.

ONE rather important point which is not mentioned at all as a rule is that the "dawn side" of the Earth leads as the Earth goes around the Sun. The point which happens to have dawn at the moment is "in front" while the antipodal point is trailing. This is of major importance when it comes

to the movements of things fired from Earth. A rocket taking off vertically at dawn will add its own velocity to the orbital velocity of the Earth. A rocket taking off vertically at dusk will subtract its own velocity from the orbital velocity of the Earth.

Now remember that every planet has *just* the necessary orbital velocity to keep it in its own orbit. If a rocket is fired "ahead" of the planet, it is "too fast" for the planet's orbit around the Sun. Consequently it will start drifting away from the Sun — in other words, it takes on an orbit which is larger than the orbit of the planet from which it was fired. As the rocket drifts away from the Sun, its velocity diminishes, and after some time the Sun's gravitational field wins out and the rocket will approach the Sun again. During this approach, its velocity increases so that, when it gets back to the orbit of the planet from which it was fired, it is again "too fast" for that particular orbit and it swings outward, away from the Sun, again.

If the rocket were fired at dusk, against the orbital movement of its home planet, it would be "too slow" for the planetary orbit. Logically, then, it would drift inward in the Solar System — it would come closer to the Sun. But while doing so, it would gather speed and become "too fast" to stay that close to the Sun. It would then start go-

ing away from the Sun — not in a straight line, of course — and reach again the orbit of the planet from which it was fired.

To summarize this in more precise language, one might say that the rocket which added velocity to the orbital velocity of its planet will have an aphelion farther from the Sun than that planet, but that its perihelion will be in the orbit of the planet of origin. Conversely, the rocket which subtracted velocity from the orbital velocity of its planet will have its perihelion closer to the Sun than that planet, but its aphelion will be in the orbit of the planet of origin.

HAVING taken care of these fundamentals first, we can look at what is known about the Russian rocket. In the American press, it was usually referred to as *Lunik* and it is even possible that some Russians used the same term. Originally, however, it did not have a name at all, but was simply called *Raketa na luna*, "Rocket to the Moon." After the shot, the Russians did advance an official name, namely *Metchta* (the accent is on the *ta*, the second syllable).

The main trouble with this name is that it cannot be translated easily. A "simplified dictionary" that I checked was indeed simplified and just said "Dream." Well, to me, a dream is something that occurs when I am asleep. *Metchta* is not

that kind of dream, but another kind. "She's a dream," "the American dream," "Dreamboat" and other expressions in English show that we and the Russians have the same idea in mind — "Daydream," meaning a flight of fancy or aspiration or something approaching perfection.

The rocket *Daydream* was fired at dawn on January 2, 1959, presumably from the rocket range in the Kyzyl Kum Desert. It was aimed and/or guided at the Moon, which looks quite large but, with a diameter of 2160 miles at a distance of 240,000 miles, is not a very big target.

The rocket missed. It is now known that it passed the surface of the Moon at a distance of 4660 miles. The instrument load of 797 pounds remained attached to the empty casing of the top stage; together, they weighed about 4030 pounds.

Now if you aim a rocket at our moon, only three different cases are possible.

The first one is the simplest (but also the least likely), namely that you hit.

The probability is somewhat better that you miss by a very narrow margin of a few hundred miles. In that case, the Moon's gravitational field would pull the rocket around the Moon in a hyperbola. At any event, that is what a textbook is likely to tell you. Actually, the

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curve described by the rocket will not be a nice mathematical hyperbola. This curve would result only if the Moon were kind enough to stand still while it pulls the rocket around itself. In reality, the Moon keeps moving at the rate of about 0.6 miles per second, so the curve will be distorted. Its so-called "escape leg" will point in the general direction of the Earth, but would miss Earth by a very large margin. Then the rocket would go into an orbit around the Sun.

The third possibility, and the one with the highest probability, is that the rocket will miss the Moon by a large margin. Large, in this case, means that the distance between rocket and Moon even at closest approach will be so large that the Moon's gravitational field will not influence the orbit of the rocket very much. The rocket, in this case, will go into an orbit around the Sun directly. This is what actually happened — to *Metchtá*, that is. It is also what is happening to our lunar probes.

SINCE the rocket was fired in the direction of the Earth's movement, it at first raced ahead of the Earth before starting to drift outward in the Solar system. As it receded from the Sun, its velocity was reduced, and by April or May, the Earth, continuing on its own orbit at a reasonably steady rate, will overtake the rocket.

The precise date is not known at the moment of writing, but in late spring, the Sun, the Earth and the rocket *Daydream* will form a straight line momentarily. Astronomically speaking, the rocket will be "in opposition."

The aphelion of the rocket is at the moment estimated as being 122.5 million miles from the Sun. This should be reached late in August. Then the rocket will come closer to the Sun again and should reach its perihelion 447 days after passing the Moon. The perihelion will be, of course, where the Earth was when the rocket was fired, near the perihelion of the Earth's orbit, 91.5 million miles from the Sun.

I hope you have looked at the diagram in the meantime (Fig. 1). It shows the orbits of Earth and Mars, of asteroid 433-Eros and of *Metchtá* drawn to scale. It can be seen that the orbit of the rocket crosses neither the orbit of Mars nor the orbit of Eros. It will come considerably closer to both than the Earth does, of course. The closest possible approach between Earth and Eros is 14 million miles. *Metchtá* and Eros can, theoretically, come as close as about eight million miles. Likewise, *Metchtá* could come as close to Mars as about 20 million miles. These two "abouts" with reference to the closest approach are due to the fact that the orbit of *Metchtá* is not yet definitely established.

Even if the rocket's instruments were still reporting, the orbit into which *Metchtá* was thrown is not particularly good, as regards possible astronomical results. Personally I have the feeling that the Russians counted on hitting the Moon. The reason for this opinion is this:

Normally one would expect to miss and it would then be a most interesting experiment to see over what distance signals from the rocket can still be received. Signals over a distance of a million miles are very likely. Beyond that, one would have to see.

It would be only logical, therefore, to equip such a rocket with as much battery power as possible, so that the signal will be broadcast for as long as possible. But the batteries of *Metchtá* went dead quite soon after the rocket passed the Moon. This is why I think the Russians counted on a hit.

BEFORE I say something about the future of *Metchtá*, I have to make one more remark about the diagram. If the rocket had been somewhat faster, its orbit might extend out far enough to touch the orbit of Mars. How close to Mars could it come in this case? The answer is that there would still be nearly three million miles between the rocket and the planet, because the rocket travels in the plane of the Earth's orbit around the Sun. This is not the same as the plane

of the orbit of Mars — the two are inclined to each other, and at the distance of Mars, the planes of the two orbits are that far apart from each other.

Well, *Metchtá* is now in orbit around the Sun, without the slightest danger of being melted. The orbital period is 447 days or just about 15 months. After 15 months, the rocket will be in Earth's orbit at the point where Earth is in early January. But fifteen months from the firing date, Earth will be three months farther along in its orbit — it will just have passed the "March 1 line." In other words, Earth will be farther and farther from the place where *Metchtá* touches Earth's orbit; Earth will have crossed the "June 1 line" the next time *Metchtá* comes to Earth's orbit, and so forth.

Later on, of course, they come closer together again, and during the winter of 1963-1964, something may happen. We don't know yet what it will be. The rocket needs four times 447 days or 1788 days for four complete revolutions. The Earth needs five times 365¼ days or 1827¼ days to complete five revolutions. The difference is just about 40 days, which is to say that Earth will reach a specific point in its orbit 40 days later than the rocket does.

But, as the diagram shows, the two orbits lead into each other very gradually.

During that winter, the rocket will be rather close to Earth for some time. Naturally Earth's gravity will go to work on it. It is most unlikely that the rocket will be forced to re-enter the atmosphere and burn up. But it is likely that it will be forced into a new orbit by the Earth then. Since the Earth will be, so to speak, behind the rocket, the rocket will be slowed down.

This should result in another orbit that is smaller than the one traveled by the rocket right now. But this is as much as can be said at the moment.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Recently, a group of friends and I were discussing the fact that a speed of 25,000 m.p.h. was necessary for a vehicle to escape the gravitational pull of the Earth. As the discussion progressed, I came up with the comment that if we had a propulsion system which could transport a vehicle at a lower speed but for an indefinite period of time, the 25,000 m.p.h. would not be necessary . . . Is it possible for a rocket to take off and travel, say, 5,000 m.p.h. for an indefinite period of time and still overcome Earth's gravity?

*James Sevchik
Justice, Illinois*

This question comes up at regular intervals and I am an-

swering it in public in the hope of getting it settled for some time.

There are several flaws in the reasoning developed. Apparently the impression is that a rocket must reach 25,000 m.p.h. and keep going at that rate to escape from the Earth's gravitational pull. This, of course, is not so. The figure of 25,000 m.p.h., or better 7 miles per second, applies to the *surface* of the Earth.

After takeoff, the vehicle, just coasting, will be slowed down by the Earth's gravitational attraction. At first it will lose 32 feet per second for every second elapsed. Then as it gets farther away from the Earth — after all, it moves at 7 miles per second minus a few times 32 feet per second — the gravitational attraction grows weaker and the vehicle loses only 30 feet per second for every second elapsed. At a still greater distance, the loss per second is down to 20 feet per second, or 10 feet per second, or 2 feet 3 inches per second. The vehicle has been considerably slowed down too, to be sure, but it still has the upper hand. Only in theoretical infinity will it be brought to a standstill, but when at an infinite distance it has, of course, escaped from the Earth.

Now this implies that the velocity required would be less

if the takeoff took place some distance from the surface. This actually is what happens. While a rocket is climbing, it is building up speed, but it is also gaining altitude. If the rocket needs long enough to reach an altitude of, say, 1000 miles to build up the necessary speed, it no longer needs to build up to the full 7 miles per second.

It saves fuel to reach the necessary velocity as soon as possible (in practice: after traversing the atmosphere) for the slower the rocket, the more fuel is wasted.

Suppose you have a rocket weighing one ton with a rocket motor developing a thrust of one ton. This rocket would just hover, and begin to rise solely because it would lose weight due to fuel consumption, while the thrust remains one ton. Now imagine that the same rocket burns its fuel twice as fast, so that it will rise from the first moment on, having a thrust of two tons. Naturally the fuel does not last as long, but it can easily be visualized that the rocket would climb much higher than the first one.

By rising slowly, you just give the Earth's gravitational attraction more time to do its dirty work.

We read almost every day in
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

the newspapers about escape from the Earth. Could we escape from the Solar System?

Sven I. Ivarsson
Washington, D. C.

Yes, we could, provided the ship is fast enough. There is a very simple relationship. Pick the planet from which you want to take off. Check its orbital velocity. Multiply said orbital velocity by the square root of two. That's the velocity you need.

This is a feminine question maybe. But I just found out that you know a lot about animals and have written books about animals, living and extinct. Would you mind telling me whether there is an animal about which you would like information? If I can, I'll try to supply it, being a librarian myself.

Estelle Landers
Oak Park, Ill.

Well, thank you for your kind offer, dear lady. I am only sorry that you won't be able to supply the information I want. It simply seems not to be known, unless somebody published something quite recently that has not yet come to my attention. The animal about which I would like to know more is one of those strange "living fossils." Its scientific name is *Galeopithecus*; its English name is "Flying Lemur." Its habitat is southeast Asia. In appearance, *Galeopithe-*

cus would remind Americans of their own "flying squirrels," though it is larger. But the "flying squirrels" are rodents and there is just no way of saying what *Galeopithecus* is, beyond the obvious statement that it is a mammal.

It has a larger flying skin than the flying squirrel, for the flying skin extends not only between fore- and hindlegs on each side, there also are two triangles of flying skin from the "wrists" to the sides of the head. Moreover, at the other end, the tail is incorporated into the flying skin. We know that it is 18 inches long and there must be males and females. But we don't know how the young are brought up. We don't even know what the adults eat. The fact that they are strictly nocturnal does not help the investigation.

One word of caution if you really want to check. You may find an old paper by Professor Florentino Ameghino of Argentina about a fossil *Galeopithecus*. Don't waste time unearthing this paper; it was later proved to be a mistake, for the fossil was not a *Galeopithecus*. Its ancestors are as unknown as its dietary habits.

I would like to suggest an article on the evolution of Man from the monkey. What proof do some sci-

entists have to make them believe this?

Dave Shtogryn
Thorold, Ontario

Well, this would have to be a book rather than an article. But I can rectify what seem to be a few wrong conceptions right now. Nobody has ever suggested that any of the living monkeys, or apes, are ancestors of Man.

If you compare the skeletons of the three living apes, gorilla, chimpanzee and orang-utan, with the skeleton of a man, you will notice how similar they are. Every bone of one is matched by a corresponding bone of the other. Only the relative sizes and proportions differ.

One especially interesting point was brought out many years ago by the English scientist Huxley. If you compare these skeletons in detail, you'll find, to your surprise, that the differences between the skeleton of the chimpanzee and the orang-utan are greater than the differences between chimpanzee and Man, or orang-utan and Man.

All of this indicates relationship. But the apes are not ancestral to Man. What has been stated by scientists for the last hundred years is that Man and the apes must have a common ancestor.

—WILLY LEY

THE SPICY SOUND OF SUCCESS

By JIM HARMON

*Now was the captain's chance to
prove he knew less than the crew
—all their lives hung upon it!*

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

THERE was nothing showing on the video screen. That was why we were looking at it so analytically.

"Transphasia, that's what it is," Ordinary Spaceman Quade stated with a definite thrust of his angular jaw in my direction. "You can take my word on that, Captain Gavin."

"Can't," I told him. "I can't trust your opinion. I can't trust any-

thing. That's why I'm Captain."

"You'll get over feeling like that."

"I know. Then I'll become First Officer."

"But look at that screen, sir," Quade said with an emphatic swing of his scarred arm. "I've seen blank scanning like that before and you haven't — it's your first trip. This always means transphasia — cortex

dissolution, motor area feedback, the Aitchell Effect—call it anything you like, it's still transphasia."

"I know what transphasia is," I said moderately. "It means an electrogravitational disturbance of incoming sense data, rechanneling it to the wrong receptive areas. Besides the human brain, it also affects electronic equipment, like radar and television."

"Obviously." Quade glanced disgustedly at the screen.

"Too obvious. This time it might not be a familiar condition of many planetary gravitational fields. On this planet, that blank kinescope may mean our Big Brother kites were knocked down by hostile natives."

"You are plain wrong, Captain. Traditionally, alien races never interfere with our explorations. Generally, they are so alien to us they can't even recognize our existence."

I DREW myself up to my full height — and noticed in irritation it was still an inch less than Quade's. "I don't understand you men. Look at yourself, Quade. You've been busted to Ordinary Spaceman for just that kind of thinking, for relying on tradition, on things that have worked before. Not only your thinking is slipshod, you've grown careless about everything else, even your own life."

"Just a minute, Captain. I've never been 'busted.' In the Explor-

ation Service, we regard Ordinary Spaceman as our highest rank. With my hazard pay, I get more hard cash than you do, and I'm closer to retirement."

"That's a shallow excuse for complacency."

"Complacency! I've seen ten thousand wonders in twenty years of space, with a million variations. But the patterns repeat themselves. We learn to know what to expect, so maybe we can't maintain the reactionary caution the service likes in officers."

"I resent the word 'reactionary,' Spaceman! In civilian life, I was a lapidary and I learned the value of deliberation. But I never got too cataleptic to tap a million-dollar gem, which is more than my contemporaries can say, many of 'em."

"Captain Gavin," Quade said patiently, "you must realize that an outsider like you, among a crew of skilled spacemen, can never be more than a figurehead."

Was this the way I was to be treated? Why, this man had deliberately insulted me, his captain. I controlled myself, remembering the familiarity that had always existed between members of a crew working under close conditions, from the time of the ancient submarines and the first orbital ships.

"Quade," I said, "there's only one way for us to find out which of us is right about the cause of our scanning blackout."

"We go out and find the reason."

"Exactly. We go. You and me. I hope you can stand my company."

"I'm not sure I can," he answered reluctantly. "My hazard pay doesn't cover exploring with rookies. With all due respect, Captain."

I clapped him on the shoulder. "But, man, you have just been telling me all we had to worry about was common transphasia. A man with your experience could protect himself and cover even a rookie, under such familiar conditions — right?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose I could," Quade said, bitterly aware he had lost out somewhere and hoping that it wasn't the start of a trend.

"**L**OOKS okay to me," I said. Quade passed a gauntlet over his faceplate. "It's real. I can blur it with a smudged visor. When it blurs, it's solid."

The landscape beyond the black corona left by our landing rockets was unimpressive. The rocky desert was made up of silicon and iron oxide, so it looked much the same as a terrestrial location. Yellowish-white sand ran up to and around reddish brown rock clawing into the pink sunlight.

"I don't understand it," Quade admitted. "Transphasia hits you a foul as soon as you let it into the airlock."

"Apparently, Quade, *this* thing

is going to creep up on us."

"Don't sound smug, Captain. It's pitty-pattying behind you too."

The keening call across the surface of consciousness postponed my reply.

The wail was ominously forlorn, defiant of description. I turned my head around slowly inside my helmet, not even sure that I had heard it.

But what else can you do with a wail but *hear* it?

Quade nodded. "I've felt this before. It usually hits sooner. Let's trace it."

"I don't like this," I admitted. "It's not at all what I expected from what you said about transphasia. It must be something else."

"It couldn't be anything else. I know what to expect. You don't. You may begin smelling sensations, tasting sounds, hearing sights, seeing tastes, touching odors — or any other combination. Don't let it bother you."

"Of course not. I'll soothe my nerves by counting little shocks of lanolin jumping over a loud fence."

Quade grinned behind his faceplate. "Good idea."

"Then you can have it. I'm going to try keeping my eyes open and staying alive."

There was no reply.

His expression was tart and greasy despite all his light talk, and I knew mine was the same. I tested the security rope between our pres-

sure suits. It was a taut and virile bass.

We scaled a staccato of rocks, our suits grinding pepper against our hides.

The musk summit rose before us, a minor-key horizon with a shifting treble for as far as I could smell. It was primitive beauty that made you feel shocking pink inside. The most beautiful vista I had ever tasted, it couldn't be dulled even by the sensation of beef broth under my skin.

"Is this transphasia?" I asked in awe.

"It always has been before," Quade remarked. "Ready to swallow your words about this being something an old hand wouldn't recognize, Captain?"

"I'm swallowing no words until I find out precisely how they taste here."

"Not a bad taste. They're pretty. Or haven't you noticed?"

"Quade, you're right! About the colors anyway. This reminds me of an illiscope recording from a cybernetic translator."

"It should. I don't suppose we could understand each other if it wasn't for our morphistudy courses in reading cross-sense translations of Centauri blushtalk and the like."

It became difficult to understand him, difficult to try talking in the face of such splendor. You never really appreciate colors until you smell them for the first time.

QUADE was as conversational as ever, though. "I can't see irregularities occurring in a gravitational field. We must have compensated for the transphasia while we still had a point of reference, the solid reality of the spaceship. But out here, where all we have to hang onto is each other, our concept of reality goes *bang* and deflates to a tired joke."

Before I could agree with one of his theories for once, a streak of spice shot past us. It bounced back tangily and made a bitter rip between the two of us. There was no time to judge its size, if it had size, or its decibel range, or its caloric count, before a small, sharp pain dug in and dwindled down to nothing in one long second.

The new odor pattern in my head told me Quade was saying something I couldn't quite make out.

Quade then pulled me in the direction of the nasty little pain.

"Wait a minute, Spaceman!" I bellowed. "Where the devil do you think you're dragging me? Halt! That's a direct order."

He stopped. "Don't you want to find out what that was? This is an exploration party, you know, sir."

"I'm not sure I do want to find out what that was just now. I didn't like the feel of it. But the important thing is for us not to get any further from the ship."

"That's important, Captain?"



"To the best of my judgment, yes. This — condition — didn't begin until we got so far away from the spacer — in time or distance. I don't want it to get any worse. It's troublesome not to know black from white, but it would be a downright inconvenience not to know which way is up."

"Not for an experienced spaceman," Quade griped. "I'm used to free-fall."

But he turned back.

"Just a minute," I said. "There was something strange up ahead. I want to see if short-range radar can get through our electrogravitational jamming here."

I took a sighting. My helmet set projected the pattern on the cornea. Sweetness building up to a stab of pure salt — those were the blips.

Beside me, there was a thin thread of violet. Quade had whistled. He was reading the map too.

The slope fell away sharply in front of us, becoming a deep gorge. There was something broken and twisted at the bottom, something we had known for an instant as a streak of spice.

"There's one free-fall," I said, "where you wouldn't live long enough to get used to it."

He said nothing on the route back to the spacer.

"I KNOW all about this sort of thing, Gav," First Officer Nagurski said expansively. He was

rubbing the well-worn ears of our beagle mascot, Bruce. A heavy tail thudded on the steel deck from time to time.

My finger could barely get in the chafing band of my regulation collar. I was hot and tired, fresh — in only the chronological sense — from a pressure suit.

"What do you know all about, Nagurski? Dogs? Spacemen? Women? Transphasia?"

"Yes," he answered casually. "But I had immediate reference to our current psychophysiological phenomenon."

I collapsed into the swivel in front of the chart table. "First off, let's hear what you know about — never mind, make it dogs."

"Take Bruce, for example, then—"

"No, thanks. I was wondering why *you* did."

"I didn't." His dark, round face was bland. "Bruce picked me. Followed me home one night in Chicago Port. The dog or the man who picks his own master is the most content."

"Bruce is content," I admitted. "He couldn't be any more content and still be alive. But I'm not sure that theory works out with men. We'd have anarchy if I tried to let these starbucks pick their own master."

"I had no trouble when I was a captain," Nagurski said. "Ease the reins on the men. Just offer them

your advice, your guidance. They will soon see why the service selected you as captain; they will pick you themselves."

"Did your crew voluntarily elect you as their leader?"

"Of course they did, Gav. I'm an old hand at controlling crews."

"Then why are you First Officer under me now?"

He blinked, then decided to laugh. "I've been in space a good many years. I really wanted to relax a little bit more. Besides, the increase in hazard pay was actually more than my salary as a captain. I'm a notch nearer retirement too."

"Tell me, did you always feel this way about letting the men select their own leader?"

NAGURSKI BROUGHT out a pipe. He would have a pipe, I decided.

"No, not always. I was like you at first. Fresh from the cosmic energy test lab, suspicious of everything, trying to tell the old hands what to do. But I learned that they are pretty smart boys; they know what they are doing. You can rely on them absolutely."

I leaned forward, elbows on knees. "Let me tell you a thing, Nagurski. Your trust of these damn-fool spacemen is why you are no longer a captain. You can't trust anything out here in space, much less human nature. Even I know that much!"

He was pained. "If you don't trust the men, they won't trust you, Gav."

"They don't have to trust me. All they have to do is obey me or, by Jupiter, get frozen stiff and thawed out just in time for court-marshal back home. Listen," I continued earnestly, "these men aren't going to think of me — of us, the officers, as their leaders. As far as the crew is concerned, Ordinary Spaceman Quade is the best man on this ship."

"He is a good man," Nagurski said. "You mustn't be jealous of his status."

The dog growled. He must have sensed what I almost did to Nagurski.

"Never mind that for now," I said wearily. "What was your idea for getting our exploration parties through this transphasia?"

"There's only one idea for that," said Quade, ducking his long head and stepping through the connecting hatch. "With the Captain's permission . . ."

"Go ahead, Quade, tell him," Nagurski invited.

"There's only one way to wade through transphasia with any reliability," Quade told me. "You keep some kind of physical contact with the spaceship. Parties are strung out on guide line, like we were, but the cable has to be run back and made fast to the hull."

"How far can we run it back?"

Quade shrugged. "Miles."

"How many?"

"We have three miles of cable. As long as you can feel, taste, see, smell or hear that rope anchoring you to home, you aren't lost."

"Three miles isn't good enough. We don't have enough fuel to change sites that often. You can't use the drive in a gravitational field, you know."

"What else can we do, Captain?" Nagurski asked puzzledly.

"You've said that the spaceship is our only protection from transphasia. Is that it?"

Quade gave a curt nod.

"Then," I told them, "we will have to start tearing apart this ship."

SERGEANT-MAJOR Hoffman and his team were doing a good job of ripping out the side of the afterhold. Through the portal I could see the suited men expertly guiding the huge curved sections on their ray projectors.

"Cannibalizing is dangerous." Nagurski put his pipe in his teeth and shook his head disapprovingly.

"Spaceships have parts as interchangeable as Erector sets. We can take apart the tractors and put our ship back together again after we complete the survey."

"You can't assemble a jigsaw puzzle if some of the pieces are missing."

"You can't get a complete picture, but you can get a good idea

of what it looks like. We can take off in a reasonable facsimile of a spaceship."

"Not," he persisted, "if too many parts are missing."

"Nagurski, if you are looking for a job safer than space exploration, why don't you go back to testing cosmic bomb shelters?"

Nagurski flushed. "Look here, Captain, you are being too damned cautious. There is a way one handles the survey of a planet like this, and this isn't the way."

"It's my way. You heard what Quade said. You know it yourself. The men have to have something tangible to hang onto out there. One slender cable isn't enough of an edge on sensory anarchy. If the product of their own technological civilization can keep them sane, I say let 'em take a part of that environment with them."

"In departing from standard procedure that we have learned to trust, you are risking more than a few men — you risk the whole mission in gambling so much of the ship. A captain doesn't take chances like that!"

"I never said I wouldn't take chances. But I'm not going to take *stupid* chances. I *might* be doing the wrong thing, but I can see you *would* be doing it wrong."

"You know nothing about space, Captain! You have to trust us."

"That's it exactly, First Officer Nagurski," I said sociably. "If you

lazy, lax, complacent slobs want to do something in a particular way, I know it *has* to be wrong."

I turned and found Wallace, the personnel man, standing in the hatchway.

"Pardon, Captain, but would you say we also lacked initiative?"

"I would," I answered levelly.

"Then you'll be interested to hear that Spaceman Quade took a suit and a cartographer unit. He's out there somewhere, alone."

"The idiot!" I yelled. "Everyone needs a partner out there. Send out a team to follow his cable and drag him in here by it."

"He didn't hook on a cable, Captain," Wallace said. "I suppose he intended to go beyond the three-mile limit as you demanded."

"Shut up, Wallace. You don't have to like me, but you can't twist what I said as long as I command this spacer."

"Cool off, Gav," Nagurski advised me. "It's been done before. Anybody else would have been a fool to go out alone, but Quade is the most experienced man we have. He knows transphasia. Trust him."

"I trusted him too far by letting him run around loose. He needs a leash in more ways than one, and I'm going to put one on him."

FOR me, it was a nightmare. I lay down in my cabin and thought. I had to think things through very carefully. One mistake was too

many for me. My worst fear had been that someday I would overlook one tiny flaw and ruin a gem. Now I might have ruined an exploration and destroyed a man, not a stone, because I had missed the flaw.

No one but a reckless fool would have gone out alone on a strange planet with a terrifying phenomenon, but I'd had enough evidence to see that space exploration *made* a man a reckless fool by doing things on one planet he had once found safe and wise on some other world.

The thought intruded itself: *why* hadn't I recognized this before I let Quade escape to almost certain death? Wasn't it because I wanted him dead, because I resented the crew's resentment of my authority, and recognized in him the leader and symbol of this resentment?

I threw away that idea along with my half-used cigarette. It might very well be true, but how did that help now?

I had to *think*.

I was going after him, that was certain. Not only for humane reasons — he was the most important member of the crew. With him around, there were only two opinions, his and mine. Without him, I'd have endless opinions to contend with.

But it wouldn't do any good to go out no better equipped than he.

There was no time to wait for tractors to be built if we wanted to reach him alive, and we certainly couldn't reach him five or ten miles out with our three miles of safety line. We would have to go in spacesuits.

But how would that leave us any better off than Quade?

Why was Quade vulnerable in his spacesuit, as I knew from experience he would be?

How could we be less vulnerable, or preferably invulnerable?

"CAPTAIN, YOU got nothing to worry about," Quartermaster Farley said. He patted a space helmet paternally. "You got yourself a self-contained environment. The suit's eye looks into yours at the arteries in the back of your eyeball so it can read your amber corpuscles and feed you your oxygen in the right amounts; you're a bottle-fed baby. If transphasia gets you seeing limburger, turn on the radar and you're air-conditioned as an igloo. Nothing short of a cosmic blast can dent that hide. You got it made."

"You are right," I said, "only transphasia comes right through these air-fast joints."

"Something strange about the trance, Captain," Farley said darkly. "Any spaceman can tell you that. Things we don't understand."

"I'm talking about something we do understand — *sound*. These suits perfectly soundproof?"

"Well, you can pick up sound by conduction. Like putting two helmets together and talking without using radio. You can't insulate enough to block out all sound and still have a man-shaped suit. You have—"

"I know. Then you have something like a tractor or a miniature spaceship. There isn't time for that. We will have to live with the sound."

"What do you think he's going to hear out there, Captain? We'd like to find one of those beautiful sirens on some planet, believe me, but—"

"I believe you," I said quickly. "Let's leave it at that. I don't know what he will hear; what's worrying me is *how* he'll hear it, in what sensory medium. I hope the sound doesn't blind him. His radar is his only chance."

"How do you figure on getting a better edge yourself, sir?"

"I have the idea, but not the word for it. Tonal compensation, I suppose. If you can't shut out the noise, we'll have to drown it out."

Farley nodded. "Beat like a telephone time signal?"

"That would do it."

"It would do something else. It would drive you nuts."

I SHRUGGED. "It might be distracting."

"Captain, take my word for it," argued Farley. "Constant sonic

feedback inside a spacesuit will set you rocking against the grain."

"Devise some regular system of interruptions," I suggested.

"Then the pattern will drive you crazy. Maybe in a few months, with luck, I could plan some harmonic scale you could tolerate—"

"We don't have a few months," I said. "How about music? There's a harmonic scale for you, and we can endure it, some of it. *Figaro* and *Asleep in the Cradle of the Deep* can compensate for high-pitched outside temperatures, and *Flight of the Bumble Bee* to block bass notes."

Farley nodded. "Might work. I can program the tapes from the library."

"Good. There's one more thing — how are our stores of medicinal liquor?"

Farley paled. "Captain, are you implying that I should be running short on alcohol? Where do you get off suggesting a thing like that?"

"I'm getting off at the right stop, apparently," I sighed. "Okay, Farley, no evasions. In plain figures, how much drinking alcohol do we have left?"

The quartermaster slumped a bit. "Twenty-one liters unbroken. One more about half full."

"Half full? How did that ever happen? I mean you had some *left*? We'll take this up later. I want you to run it through the synthesizer to get some light wine . . ."

"Light wine?" Farley looked in pain. "Not whiskey, brandy, beer?"

"Light wine. Then ration it out to some of the men."

"Ration it to the men!"

"That's an accurate interpretation of my orders."

"But, sir," Farley protested, "you don't give alcohol to the crew in the middle of a mission. It's not done. What reason can you have?"

"To sharpen their taste and olfactory senses. We can turn up or block out sound. We can use radar to extend our sight, but the Space Service hasn't yet developed anything to make spacemen taste or smell better."

"They are going to smell like a herd of winos," Farley said. "I don't like to think how they would taste."

"It's an entirely practical idea. Tea-tasters used to drink almond-and-barley water to sharpen their senses. I've observed that wine helps you appreciate culinary art more. Considering the mixed-up sensory data under transphasia, wine may help us to see where we are going."

"Yes, sir," Farley said obediently. "I'll give spacemen a few quarts of wine, telling them to use it carefully for scientific purposes only, and then they will be able to see where they are going. Yes, sir."

I turned to leave, then paused briefly. "You can come along, Farley. I'm sure you want to see that we don't waste any of the stuff."

"**T**HERE they are!" Nagurski called. "Quade's footsteps again, just beyond that rocky ridge."

The landscape was rich chocolate ice cream smothered with chocolate syrup, caramel, peanuts and maple syrup, eaten while you smoked an old, mellow Havana. The footsteps were faint traces of whipped cream across the dark, rich taste of the planet.

I splashed some wine from my drinking tube against the roof of my mouth to sharpen my taste. It brought out the footsteps sharper. It also made the landscape more of a teen-ager's caloric nightmare.

The four of us pulled ourselves closer together by reeling in more of our safety line. Farley and Hoffman, Nagurski and myself, we were cabled together. It gave us a larger hunk of reality to hold onto. Even so, things wavered for me during a wisp of time.

We stumbled over the ridge, feeling out the territory. It was a sticky job crawling over a melting, chunk-style Hershey bar. I was thankful for the invigorating Sousa march blasting inside my helmet. Before the tape had cut in, kicked on by the decibel gauge, I had heard or felt something dark and ominous in the outside air.

"Yes, this is definitely the trail of Quail," Nagurski said soberly. "This is serious business. I must ask whoever has been giggling on

this channel to shut up. Pardon me, Captain. You weren't giggling, sir?"

"I have never giggled in my life, Nagurski."

"Yes, sir. That's what we all thought."

A moment later, Nagurski added, "Anyway, I just noticed it was my shelf — my, that is, self."

The basso profundo performing *Figaro* on my headset climbed to a girlish shriek. A sliver of ice. This was the call Quade and I had first heard as we were about to troop over a cliff. I dug in my heels.

"Take a good look around, boys," I said. "What do you see?"

"Quail," Nagurski replied. "That's what I see."

"You," I said carefully, "have been in space a *long* time. Look again."

"I see our old buddy, Quail."

I took another slosh of burgundy and peered up ahead. It was Quade. A man in a spacesuit, faceplate in the dust, two hundred yards ahead.

Grudgingly I stepped forward, out of the shadow of the ridge. A hysterically screaming wind rocked me on my toes. We pushed on sluggishly to Quade's side, moving to the tempo of *Pomp and Circumstance*.

Farley lugged Quade over on his back and read his gauges.

The Quartermaster rose with grim deliberation, and hiccuped. "Better get him back to the spaceship fast. I've seen this kind of

thing before with transphasia. His body cooled down because of the screaming wind — psychosomatic reaction — and his heating circuits compensated for the cool flesh. The poor devil's got frostbite and heat prostration."

THE FOUR of us managed to haul Quade back by using the powered joints in our suits. Hoffman suggested that he had once seen an injured man walked back inside his suit like a robot, but it was a delicate adjustment, controlling power circuits from outside a suit. It was too much for us — we were too tired, too numb, too drunk.

At first sight of the spacer in the distance, transphasia left me with only a chocolate-tasting pink after-image on my retina. It was now showing bare skeleton from cannibalization for tractor parts, but it looked good to me, like home.

The wailing call sounded through the amber twilight.

I realized that I was actually *hearing* it for the first time.

The alien stood between us and the ship. It was a great pot-bellied lizard as tall as a man. Its sound came from a flat, vibrating beaver tail. Others of its kind were coming into view behind it.

"Stand your ground," I warned the others thickly. "They may be dangerous."

Quade sat up on our crisscross litter of arms. "Aliens can't be hos-

tile. Ethnic impossibility. I'll show you."

Quade was delirious and we were drunk. He got away from us and jogged toward the herd.

"Let's give him a hand!" Farley shouted. "We'll take us a specimen!"

I couldn't stop them. Being in Alpine rope with them, I went along. At the time, it even seemed vaguely like a good idea.

As we lumbered toward them, the aliens fell back in a solid line except for the first curious-looking one. Quade got there ahead of us and made a grab. The creature rose into the air with a screaming vibration of his tail and landed on top of him, flattening him instantly.

"Sssh, men," Nagurski said. "Leave it to me. I'll surround him."

The men followed the First Officer's example, and the rope tying them to him. I went along cheerfully myself, until an enormous rump struck me violently in the face. My leaded boots were driven down into fertile soil, and my helmet was ringing like a bell. I got a jerky picture of the beast jumping up and down on top of the others joyously. Only the stiff space armor was holding up our slack frames.

"Let's let him escape," Hoffman suggested on the audio circuit.

"I'd like to," Nagurski admitted, "but the other beasts won't let us get past their circle."

It was true. The aliens formed a ring around us, and each time a bouncing boy hit the line, he only bounced back on top of us.

"Flat!" I yelled. "Our seams can't take much more of this beating."

I followed my own advice and landed in the dirt beside Quade.

The bouncer came to rest and regarded us silently, head on an eighty-degree angle.

I was stone sober.

The others were lying around me quietly, passed out, knocked out, or taking cover.

The ring of aliens drew in about us, closer, tighter, as the bouncer sat on his haunches and waited for us to move.

"**F**EELING better?" I asked Quade in the infirmary.

He punched up his pillow and settled back. "I guess so. But when I think of all the ways I nearly got myself killed out there . . . How far have you got in the tractors?"

"I'm having the tractors torn down and the parts put back into the spaceship where they belong. We *shouldn't* risk losing them and getting stuck here."

"Are you settling for a primary exploration?"

"No. I think I had the right idea on your rescue party. You have to meet and fight a planet on its own terms. Fighting confused sounds and tastes with music and wine was crude, but it was on the right track.

Out there, we understood language because we were familiar with alien languages changed to other sense mediums by cybernetic translators. Using the translator, we can learn to recognize all confused data as easily. I'm starting indoctrination courses."

"I doubt that that is necessary, sir," Quade said. "Experienced spacemen are experienced with transphasia. You don't have to worry. In the future, I'll be able to resist sensations that tell me I'm freezing to death — if my gauges tell me it's a lie."

I examined his bandisprayed hide. "I think my way of gaining experience is less painful and more efficient."

Quade squirmed. "Yes, sir. One thing, sir — I don't understand how you got me away from those aliens."

"The aliens were trying to help. They knew something was wrong and they were prodding and probing. When the first tractor pulled up and the men got out, they seemed to realize our own people could help us easier than they could."

"I am not quite convinced that those babies just meant to help us all the time."

"But they did! First, that call of theirs — it wasn't to lead us into danger, but to warn us of the cliff, the freezing wind. They saw we were trying to find out things about their world, so they even offered us

one of their own kind to study. Unfortunately, he was too much for us. They didn't give us their top man, of course, only the village idiot. It's just as well. We aren't allowed to dissect creatures that far up the intelligence scale."

"But why should they want to help us?" Quade demanded suspiciously.

"I think it's like Nagurski's dog. The dog came to him when it wanted somebody to own it, protect it, feed it, love it. These aliens *want* Earthmen to colonize the planet. We came here, you see, same as the dog came to Nagurski."

"Well, I've learned one thing from all of this," Quade said. "I've been a blind, arrogant, cocksure fool, following courses that were good on *some* worlds, *most* worlds, but not good on *all* worlds. I'm never going to be that foolhardy again."

"But you're losing *confidence*, Quade! You aren't sure of yourself any more. Isn't confidence a space-

man's most valuable asset?"

"The hell it is," Quade said grimly. "It's his deadliest liability."

"In that case, I must inform you that I am demoting you to Acting Executive Officer."

"Huh?" Quade gawked. "But dammit, Captain, you can't do that to me! I'll lose hazard pay and be that much further from retirement!"

"That's tough," I sympathized, "but in every service a chap gets broken in rank now and then."

"Maybe it's worth it," Quade said heavily. "Now maybe I've learned how to stay alive out here. I just hope I don't forget."

I thought about that. I was nearly through with my first mission and I could speak with experience, even if it was the least amount of experience aboard.

"Quade," I said, "space isn't as dangerous as all that." I clapped him on the shoulder fraternally. "You worry too much!"

— JIM HARMON

In The Next Issue

WAY UP YONDER, a novelet by Charles Satterfield — a girl's hand is all he wants of this plantation world — and it cottons to him no more than if he were a Yankee spy!

Send not to know for whom the telephone rings —

it'll send for you if the number you so innocently dial

happens to be . . .

MUGwump four

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

Illustrated By: MARTIN



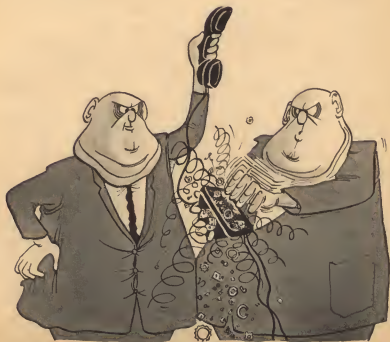
AL Miller was only trying to phone the Friendly Finance Corporation to ask about an extension on his loan. It was a Murray Hill number, and he had dialed as far as MU-4 when the receiver clicked queerly and a voice said, "Come in, Operator Nine. Operator Nine, do you read me?"

Al frowned. "I didn't want the operator. There must be something wrong with my phone if—"

"Just a minute. Who are you?"

"I ought to ask you that," Al said. "What are you doing on the other end, anyway? I hadn't even finished dialing. I got as far as MU-4 and—"

"Well? You dialed MUgump



4 and you got us. What more do you want?" A suspicious pause. "Say, you aren't Operator Nine!"

"No, I'm *not* Operator Nine, and I'm trying to dial a Murray Hill number, and how about getting off the line?"

"Hold it, friend. Are you a Normal?"

Al blinked. "Yeah—yeah, I like to think so."

"So how'd you know the number?"

"Dammit, I *didn't* know the number! I was trying to call someone, and all of a sudden the phone cut out and I got you, whoever the blazes you are."

"I'm the communications warden at MUgwump 4," the other said crisply. "And you're a suspicious individual. We'll have to investigate you."

The telephone emitted a sudden burping sound. Al felt as if his feet had grown roots. He could not move at all. It was awkward to be standing there at his own telephone in the privacy of his own room, as unbending as a steel girder. Time still moved, he saw. The hand on the big clock above the phone had just shifted from 3:30 to 3:31.

Sweat rivered down his back as he struggled to put down the phone. He fought to lift his left foot. He strained to twitch his right eyelid. No go on all counts; he was frozen, all but his chest muscles — thank goodness for that.

SEVERAL minutes later, matters became even more awkward when his front door, which had been locked, opened abruptly. Three strangers entered. They looked oddly alike: a trio of Tweedledums, no more than five feet high, wide through the waist, jowly of face and balding of head, each wearing an inadequate single-breasted blue serge suit.

Al discovered he could roll his eyes. He rolled them. He wanted to apologize because his unexpected paralysis kept him from acting the proper part of a host, but his tongue would not obey. And on second thought, it occurred to him that the little bald men might be connected in some way with that paralysis.

The reddest-faced of the three little men hung up the telephone and the stasis ended. Al nearly folded up as the tension that gripped him broke. He said, "Just who the deuce—"

"We will ask the questions. You are Al Miller?"

Al nodded.

"And obviously you are a Normal. So there has been a grave error. Mordecai, examine the telephone."

The second little man picked up the phone and calmly disemboweled it with three involved motions of his stubby hands. He frowned over the telephone's innards for a moment; then, humming tuneless-

ly, he produced a wire-clipper and severed the telephone cord.

"Hold on here!" Al burst out. "You can't just rip out my phone like that! You aren't from the phone company!"

"Quiet," said the spokesman nastily. "Well, Mordecai?"

The second little man said, "Probability 1 to 1,000,000. The cranch interval overlapped and his telephone matrix slipped. His call was piped into our wire by error, Waldemar."

"So he isn't a spy?" Waldemar asked.

"Doubtful. As you see, he's of rudimentary intelligence. His dialing our number was a statistical fluke."

"But now he knows about us," said the third little man in a surprisingly deep voice. "I vote for demolecularization."

The other two whirled on their companion. "Always bloodthirsty, eh, Giovanni?" said Mordecai. "You'd violate the code at the snap of a meson."

"There won't be any demolecularization while I'm in charge," added Waldemar.

"What do we do with him then?" Giovanni demanded.

Mordecai said, "Freeze him and take him down to Headquarters. He's *their* problem."

"I think this has gone about as far as it's going to go," Al exploded at last. "However you three creeps

got in here, you'd better get yourselves right out again, or—"

"Enough," Waldemar said.

Al felt his jaws stiffen. He realized bewilderedly that he was frozen again. And frozen, this time, with his mouth gaping foolishly open.

THE trip took about five minutes, and so far as Al was concerned, it was one long blur. At the end of the journey, the blur lifted for an instant, long enough to give Al one good glimpse of his surroundings — a residential street in what might have been Brooklyn or Queens (or Cincinnati or Detroit, he thought morbidly) — before he was hustled into the basement of a two-family house. He found himself in a windowless, brightly lit chamber cluttered with complex-looking machinery and with a dozen or so alarmingly identical little bald-headed men. Not until then did his paralysis lift.

The chubbiest of the bunch glared sourly at him and asked, "Are you a spy?"

"I'm just an innocent bystander," Al said earnestly. "I picked up my phone and started to dial, and all of a sudden some guy asked me if I was Operator Nine. Honest, that's all."

"Overlapping of the cranch interval," muttered Mordecai. "Slipped matrix."

"Umm. Unfortunate," the chub-

by one commented. "We'll have to dispose of him."

"Demolecularization is the best way," Giovanni put in immediately.

"Dispose of him *humanely*, I mean. It's revolting to think of taking the life of an inferior being. But he simply can't remain in this four-space any longer, not if he knows."

"But I don't know!" Al protested. "I couldn't be any more mixed up if I tried! Won't you please tell me—"

"Very well," said the pudgiest one, who seemed to be the leader. "Waldemar, tell him about us."

Waldemar said, "You're now in the local headquarters of a secret mutant group working for the overthrow of humanity as you know it. By some accident, you happened to dial our private communication exchange, MUtAnt 4—"

"I thought it was MUgWump 4," Al interjected.

"The code name, naturally," said Waldemar. "To continue: you channeled into our communication network. You now know too much. Your presence in this space-time nexus jeopardizes the success of our entire movement. Therefore we are forced—"

"—to demolecularize—" Giovanni began.

"—to dispose of you," Waldemar continued sternly. "We're humane beings — most of us — and we won't do anything that would make you

suffer. But you can't stay in this area of space-time, can you?"

Al shook his head dimly. These little potbellied men were mutants working for the overthrow of humanity? Well, he had no reason to think they were lying to him. The world was full of little potbellied men. Maybe they were all part of the secret organization.

"Look," he said, "I didn't *want* to dial your number. It was all a silly accident. But I'm a fair guy. Let me get out of here and I'll keep mum about the whole thing. You can go ahead and overthrow humanity, if that's what you want to do. I promise not to interfere in any way. If you're mutants, you ought to be able to look into my mind and see that I'm sincere—"

"We have no telepathic powers," declared the chubby leader curtly. "If we had, there would be no need for a communications network in the first place. In the second place, your sincerity is not the issue. We have enemies. If you were to fall into their hands—"

"I won't say a word! Even if they torture me — brainwash me — I swear I'll keep quiet!"

"No. At this stage in our campaign, we can take no risks. You'll have to go. Prepare the temporal centrifuge, Mordecai."

FOUR of the little men, led by Mordecai, unveiled a complicated-looking device of the general

size and shape of a concrete mixer. Waldemar and Giovanni shoved Al toward the machine. It came rapidly to life: dials glowed, indicator needles teetered, loud buzzes and clicks implied readiness.

Al said nervously, "What are you going to do to me?"

"This machine will hurl you forward in time," Waldemar explained. "Too bad we have to rip you right out of your temporal matrix, but we've no choice. You'll be well taken care of up ahead, though. No doubt, by the 25th century, our kind will have taken over completely. You'll be the last of the Normals. Practically a living fossil. You'll love it. You'll be a walking museum piece."

"Assuming the machine works," Giovanni put in maliciously. "We don't really know if it does, you see."

Al gaped. They were busily strapping him to a cold copper slab in the heart of the machine. "You don't even know if it *works*?"

"Not really," Waldemar admitted. "Present theory holds that time-travel works only one way — forward. So we haven't been able to recover any of our test specimens and see how they reacted. Of course, they *do* vanish when the machine is turned on, so we know they must go *somewhere*."

"Oh," Al said weakly.

He was trussed in thoroughly. Experimental wriggling of his right

wrist showed him that. But even if he could get loose, these weird little men would only freeze him and put him into the machine again.

His shoulders slumped resignedly. He wondered if anyone would miss him. The Friendly Finance Corporation certainly would. But since, in a sense, it was their fault he was in this mess now, he couldn't get very upset about that. They could always sue his estate for the \$300 he owed them, if his estate was worth that much.

Nobody else was going to mind the disappearance of Albert Miller from the space-time continuum, he thought dourly. His parents were dead, he hadn't seen his one sister in fifteen years, and the girl he used to know in Topeka was married and at last report had three kids.

STILL and all, he liked 1959. He wasn't sure how he would take to the 25th century — or the 25th century to him.

"Ready for temporal discharge," Mordecai sang out.

The chubby leader peered up at Al. "We're sorry about all this, you understand. But nothing and nobody can be allowed to stand in the way of the Cause."

"Sure," Al said. "I understand."

The concrete-mixer part of the machine began to revolve, bearing Al with it as it built up tempokinetic potential. Momentum in-

creased alarmingly. In the background, Al heard an ominous droning sound that grew louder and louder, until it drowned out everything else. His head reeled. The room and its fat little mutants went blurry. He heard a *pop!* like the sound of a breaking balloon.

It was the rupturing of the space-time continuum. Al Miller went hurtling forward along the four-space track, head first. He shut his eyes and hoped for the best.

WHEN the dizziness stopped, he found himself sitting in the middle of an impeccably clean, faintly yielding roadway, staring up at the wheels of vehicles swishing by overhead at phenomenal speeds. After a moment or two more, he realized they were not airborne, but simply automobiles racing along an elevated roadway made of some practically invisible substance.

So the temporal centrifuge *had* worked!

Al glanced around. A crowd was collecting. A couple of hundred people had formed a big circle. They were pointing and muttering. Nobody approached closer than fifty or sixty feet.

They weren't potbellied mutants. Without exception, they were all straight-backed six-footers with full heads of hair. The women were tall, too. Men and women alike were dressed in a sort of tuniclike garment made of iridescent ma-

terial that constantly changed colors.

A gong began to ring, rapidly peaking in volume. Al scrambled to his feet and put on a tentative smile.

"My name's Miller. I come from 1959. Would somebody mind telling me what year this is, and—"

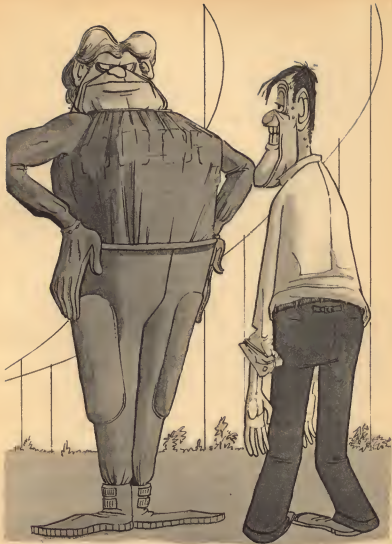
He was drowned out by two hundred voices screaming in terror. The crowd stampeded away, dashing madly in every direction, as if he were some ferocious monster. The gong continued to clang loudly. Cars hummed overhead.

Al saw a squat, beetle-shaped black vehicle coming toward him on the otherwise empty road. The car pulled up half a block away, the top sprang open, and a figure clad in what might have been a driver's suit — or a spacesuit — stepped out and advanced toward Al.

"Dozzinon murrifar volan," the armored figure called out.

"No speak," Al replied. "I'm a stranger here."

To his dismay, he saw the other draw something shaped like a weapon and point it at him. Al's hands shot immediately into the air. A globe of bluish light exuded from the broad nozzle of the gun, hung suspended for a moment, and drifted toward Al. He dodged uneasily to one side, but the globe of light followed him, descended, and wrapped itself around him.



It was like being on the inside of a soap-bubble. He could see out, though distortedly. He touched the curving side of the globe in a cautious way; it was resilient and springy to the touch, but his finger did not go through.

He noticed with some misgiving that his bubble-cage was starting to drift off the ground. It trailed a ropelike extension, which the man in the armored suit deftly grabbed and knotted to the rear bumper of his car. He drove quickly away — with Al, bobbing in his impenetrable bubble of light, tagging helplessly along like a captured Gaul being dragged through the streets of Rome behind a chariot — but several feet in the air.

He got used to the irregular motion after a while and relaxed enough to be able to study his surroundings. He was passing through a remarkably antiseptic-looking city, free from refuse and dust. Towering buildings, all bright and spankingly new-looking, shot up everywhere. People goggled at him from the safety of the pedestrian walkways as he jounced past.

AFTER about ten minutes, the car halted outside an imposing building whose facade bore the words ISTFAQ BARNOLL. Three men in armored suits appeared from within to flank Al's captor as a kind of honor guard. Al was borne within.

He was nudged gently into a small room on the ground floor. The door rolled shut behind him and seemed to join the rest of the wall; no division-line was apparent. A moment later, the balloon popped open, and just in time, too; the air had been getting quite stale inside it.

Al glanced around. A square window opened in the wall and three grim-faced men peered intently at him from an adjoining cubicle.

A voice from a speaker grid above Al's head said, "Murrifar althrosk?"

"Al Miller, from the 20th century. And it wasn't my idea to come here, believe me."

"Durbetal haznik? Quittimar?"

Al shrugged. "No parley-voo. Honest, I don't savvy."

His three interrogators conferred among themselves — taking what seemed to Al the needless precaution of switching off the mike to prevent him from overhearing their deliberations.

He saw one of the men leave the observation cubicle. When the man returned, some five minutes later, he brought with him a tall, gloomy-looking man wearing an impressive spade-shaped beard.

The mike was turned on again. Spadebeard said rumblingly, "How be thou hight?"

"Eh?"

"An thou reck the King's tongue, I conjure thee speak!"

Al grinned. No doubt they had fetched an expert in dead languages to talk to him. "Right language, but the wrong time. I'm from the 20th century, not the tenth. Come forward a ways."

Spadebeard paused to change mental gears. "A thousand pardons — I mean *sorry*. Wrong idiom. Dig me now?"

"I follow you. What year is this?"

"It is 2431. And from whence be you?"

"You don't quite have it straight yet, but I'm from 1959."

"And how came you hither?"

"I wish I knew," Al said. "I was just trying to phone the loan company, see? Anyway, I got involved with these little fat guys who wanted to take over the world. Mutants, they said they were. And they decided they had to get rid of me, so they bundled me into their time machine and shot me forward. So I'm here."

"A spy of the mutated ones, eh?"

"Spy? Who said anything about a spy? Talk about jumping to conclusions! I'm—"

"You have been sent by them to wreak mischief among us. No transparent story of yours will deceive us. You are not the first to come to our era, you know. And you will meet the same fate the others met."

AL shook his head foggily. "Look here, you're making a big mistake. I'm not a spy for anybody.

And I don't want to get involved in any war between you and the mutants—"

"The war is over. The last of the mutated ones was exterminated 50 years ago."

"Okay, then. What can you fear from me? Honest, I don't want to cause any trouble. If the mutants are wiped out, how could my spying help them?"

"No action in time and space is ever absolute. In our fourspace, the mutants are eradicated — but they lurk elsewhere, waiting for their chance to enter and spread destruction."

Al's brain was swimming. "Let's let that pass. I'm not a spy. I just want to be left alone. Let me settle down here somewhere — put me on probation, show me the ropes, stake me to a few credits, or whatever you use for money here. I won't make any trouble."

"Your body teems with micro-organisms of diseases long extinct in this world. Only the fact that we were able to confine you in a force-bubble almost as soon as you arrived here saved us from a terrible epidemic of ancient diseases."

"A couple of injections, that's all, and you can kill any bacteria on or in me," Al pleaded. "You're advanced people. You ought to be able to do a simple thing like that."

"And then there is the matter of your genetic structure," Spade-

beard continued inexorably. "You bear genes long since eliminated from humanity as undesirable. Permitting you to remain here, breeding furtively, would introduce unutterable confusion. Perhaps you carry latently the same mutant strain that cost humanity so many centuries of bloodshed!"

"No," Al protested. "Look at me. I'm pretty tall, no potbelly, a full head of hair—"

"The gene is recessive. But it crops up unexpectedly."

"I solemnly promise to control my breeding," Al declared. "I won't run around scattering my genes all over your shiny new world. That's a promise."

"Your appeal is rejected," came the inflexible reply.

Al shrugged. He knew when he was beaten. "Okay," he said wearily. "I didn't want to live in your damn century anyway. When's the execution?"

"Execution?" Spadebeard looked stunned. "Dove's whiskers, do you think we would—would actually—"

He couldn't get the word out.

Al supplied it: "Put me to death?"

Spadebeard's expression was sickly. He looked ready to retch. Al heard him mutter vehemently to his companions in the observation cubicle: "Gonnim def larrimog! Eg-far!"

"Murrifar althrosk," suggested one of his companions.





Spadebeard, evidently reassured, nodded. He said to Al, "No doubt a barbarian like yourself *would* expect to be — to be made dead." Gulping, he went gamely on. "We have no such vindictive intention."

"Well, what *are* you going to do to me?"

"Send you across the timeline to a world where your friends, the mutated ones, reign supreme," Spadebeard replied. "It's the least we can do for you, spy."

THE hidden door of his cell puckered open. Another armor-suited figure entered, pointing a gun, and discharged a blob of blue light that drifted toward Al and rapidly englobed him. He was drawn by the trailing end out into a corridor.

It hadn't been a very sociable reception here in the 25th century, he thought as he was tugged along the hallway. In a way, he couldn't blame them. A time-traveler from the past was bound to be laden down with all sorts of germs. They couldn't risk letting him run around *breathing* at everybody. No wonder that crowd of onlookers had panicked when he had opened his mouth to speak to them.

The other business, though, that of his being a spy for the mutants—he couldn't figure that out at all. If the mutants had been wiped out fifty years ago, why worry about spies now? At least his species had

managed to defeat the underground organization of potbellied little men. That was comforting. He wished he could get back to 1959, if only to snap his fingers in their jowly faces and tell them that all their sinister scheming was going to come to nothing.

Where was he heading now? Spadebeard had said, *Across the timeline to a world where the mutated ones reign supreme*. Whatever across the timeline meant, Al thought.

He was ushered into an impressive laboratory room and, bubble and all, was thrust into the waiting clasps of something that looked depressingly like an electric chair. Brisk technicians bustled around, throwing switches and checking connections.

Al glanced in appeal at Spadebeard. "Will you tell me what's going on?"

"It is very difficult to express in medieval terms," the linguist said. "The device makes use of dollibar force to transmit you through an inverse dormin vector — do I make myself clear?"

"Not very," Al confessed.

"Unhelpable. But you understand the concept of parallel continua at least, of course."

"No."

"Does it mean anything to you if I say that you'll be shunted across the spokes of the time-wheel to a totality that is simultaneously

parallel and tangent to our four-space?"

"That isn't much better," Al said resignedly, for all he was really getting was a headache. "You might as well start shunting me, I suppose."

Spadebeard nodded and turned to a technician. "Vorstrar althrosk," he commanded.

"Murrifar."

The technician grabbed an immense toggle switch with both hands and groaningly dragged it shut. Al heard a brief whine of closing relays. Then darkness surrounded him.

ONCE again he found himself on a city street. But the pavement was cracked and buckled, and grassblades poked up through the neglected concrete.

A dry voice said, "All right, you. Don't sprawl there like a ninny. Get up and come along."

Al peered doubtfully up into the snout of a fair-sized pistol of enormous caliber. It was held by a short, fat, bald-headed man. Four identical companions stood near him with arms folded. They all looked very much like Mordecai, Walde-mar, Giovanni, and the rest, except that these mutants were decked out in futuristic-looking costumes bright with flashy gold trim and rocketship insignia.

Al put up his hands. "Where am I?" he asked in confusion.

"Earth, of course. You've just

come through a dimensional gateway from the continuum of the Normals. Come along, spy. Into the van."

"But I'm *not* a spy," Al mumbled without very much hope as the five little men bundled him into a blue and red car the size of a small yacht. "At least, I'm not spying on you. I mean—"

"Save the explanations for the Overlord," was the curt instruction.

Al huddled miserably cramped between two vigilant mutants, while the others sat behind him. The van moved seemingly of its own volition, and at an enormous rate. A mutant power, Al thought. After a while he said, "Could you at least tell me what year this is?"

"Yes — 2431," snapped the mutant to his left.

"But that's the same year it was over *there*."

"Certainly. What else could it be?"

The question floored Al. He was silent for perhaps half a mile more. Since the van had no windows, he stared morosely at his feet.

Finally he asked, "How come you aren't afraid of catching my germs then? Over back of — ah — the dimensional gateway, they kept me cooped up in a force-field all the time so I wouldn't contaminate them. But you go right ahead breathing the same air I do."

"Do you think we fear the germs of a Normal, spy?" sneered the mu-

tant at Al's right. "You forget that we're a superior race."

Al nodded. "Yes. I forgot about that."

The van halted suddenly and the mutant police hustled Al out, past a crowd of peering little fat men and women, and into a colossal dome of a building whose exterior was covered completely with faceted green glass. The effect was one of massive ugliness.

They ushered him into a sort of throne room presided over by a mutant fatter than the rest. The policeman gripping Al's right arm hissed, "Bow when you enter the presepce of the Overlord."

Al wasn't minded to argue. He dropped to his knees along with the others. A booming voice from above rang out. "What have you brought me today?"

"A spy, Your Nobility."

"Another? Rise, spy."

Al rose. "Begging Your Nobility's pardon, I'd like to put in a word or two on my own behalf—"

"Silence!" the Overlord roared.

Al closed his mouth.

The mutant drew himself up to his full height, about five feet one, and said, "The Normals have sent you across the dimensional gulf to spy on us."

"No, Your Nobility. They were afraid I'd spy on *them*, so they sent me over here. I'm from the year 1959, you see." Briefly, he explained everything, beginning with

the bollixed phone call and ending with his capture by the Overlord's men a short while ago.

The Overlord looked skeptical. "It is well known that the Normals plan to cross the dimensional gulf from their phantom world to this, the real one, and invade our civilization. You're but the latest of their advance scouts. Admit it!"

"No, Your Nobility, I'm not. On the other side, they told me I was a spy from 1959, and now you say I'm a spy from the other dimension. But I tell you—"

"Enough!" the mutant leader thundered. "Take him away. Place him in custody. We shall decide his fate later!"

SOMEONE else already occupied the cell into which Al was thrust. He was a lanky, sad-faced Normal who slouched forward to shake hands once the door had clanged shut.

"Thurizad manifosk," he said.

"Sorry, I don't speak that language," said Al.

The other grinned. "I understand. All right: greetings. I'm Darren Phelp. Are you a spy too?"

"No, dammit!" Al snapped. Then: "Sorry. Didn't mean to take it out on you. My name's Al Miller. Are you a native of this place?"

"Me? Dove's whiskers, what a sense of humor! Of course I'm not a native! You know as well as I do that there aren't any Normals left

in this fourspace continuum."

"None at all?"

"Hasn't been one born here in centuries," Phelp said. "But you're just joking, eh? You're from Baileffod's outfit, I suppose."

"Who?"

"Baileffod. *Baileffod!* You mean you aren't? Then you must be from higher up!" Phelp thrust his hands sideways in some kind of gesture of respect. "Penguin's paws, Excellency, I apologize. I should have seen at once—"

"No, I'm not from your organization at all," Al said. "I don't know what you're talking about. Word of honor."

Phelp smiled cunningly. "Of course, Excellency! I understand completely."

"Cut that out! Why doesn't anyone ever believe me? I'm not from Baileffod and I'm not from higher up. I come from 1959. Do you hear me — 1959? And that's the truth."

Phelp's eyes went wide. "From the past?"

Al nodded. "I stumbled into the mutants in 1959 and they shipped me five centuries ahead to get rid of me. Only when I arrived, I wasn't welcome, so I was shipped across the dimensional whatzis to here. Everyone thinks I'm a spy, wherever I go. What are *you* doing here?"

Phelp smiled. "Why, I *am* a spy." "From 2431?"

"Naturally. We have to keep

tabs on the mutants somehow. I came through the gateway wearing an invisibility shield, but it popped an ultrone and I vizzed out. They jugged me last month and I suppose I'm stuck in this place for keeps."

AL rubbed thumbs tiredly against his eyeballs. "Wait a minute—how come you speak my language? On the other side, they had to get hold of a linguistics expert to talk to me."

"All spies are trained to talk English," said Phelp. "That's the language the mutants speak here. In the real world, we speak Vorkish, naturally. It's the language developed by Normals for communication during the Mutant Wars. Your 'linguistics expert' was probably one of our top spies."

"And over here the mutants have won?"

"Completely. Three hundred years ago, in this continuum, the mutants developed a two-way time machine that enabled them to go back and forth, eliminating Normal leaders before they were born. Whereas in our world, the *real* world, two-way time travel is impossible. That's where the continuum split begins. We Normals fought a grim war of extermination against the mutants in our four-space and finally wiped them out, despite their superior powers, in 2390. Clear?"

"More or less." Rather less than more, Al added privately. "So there are only mutants in this world, and there are only Normals in your world."

"Exactly!"

"And you're a spy from the other side."

"You've got it now! You see, even though, strictly speaking, this world is only a phantom, it's got some pretty real characteristics. For instance, if the mutants killed you here, you'd be dead. Permanently. So there's a lot of rivalry across the gateway; the mutants are always scheming to invade us, and vice versa. Confidentially, I don't think anything will ever come of all the scheming."

"You don't?"

"Nah," Phelp said. "The way things stand now, each side has a perfectly good enemy just beyond reach. But actually going to war would be messy, while relaxing our guard and allowing peace to break out would foul up our economy. So we keep sending spies back and forth, and prepare for war. It's a nice system, except when you happen to get yourself caught, like me."

"What'll happen to you?"

Phelp shrugged. "They may let me rot here for a few decades. Or they might decide to condition me and send me back as a spy for *them*. Tiger tails, who could know?"

"Would you change sides like that?"

"I wouldn't have any choice — not after I was conditioned," Phelp said. "But I don't worry much about it. It's a risk I knew about when I signed on for spy duty."

Al shuddered. It was beyond him how someone could voluntarily let himself get involved in this game of dimension-shifting and mutant-battling. But it takes all sorts to make a continuum, he philosophically decided.

HALF an hour later, three ro-tund mutant police came to fetch him. They marched him downstairs and into a bare, ugly little room where a battery of interrogators quizzed him for better than an hour. He stuck to his story, throughout everything, until at last they indicated they were through with him.

He spent the next two hours in a drafty cell, by himself, until finally a gaudily robed mutant unlocked the door and said, "The Overlord commands you to present yourself."

The Overlord looked worried. He leaned forward on his throne, fist digging into his fleshy chin. In his booming voice — Al realized at last that it was artificially amplified — the Overlord rumbled, "Miller, you're a *problem*."

"I'm sorry, Your Nobil—"

"Quiet! I'll do the talking."

Al did not reply.

The Overlord went on, "We've checked your story inside and out, and confirmed it with one of our spies on the other side of the gate. You really are from 1959, or thereabouts. What can we do with you? Generally speaking, when we catch a Normal snooping around here, we psycho-condition him and send him back across the gateway to spy for us. But we can't do that to you, because you don't belong on the other side, and they've already tossed you out once. On the other hand, we can't keep you here, maintaining you forever at state expense. And it wouldn't be civilized to kill you, would it?"

"No, Your Nobil—"

"Silence!"

Al gulped.

The Overlord glowered at him and continued thinking out loud. "I suppose we could perform experiments on you, though. You must be a walking laboratory of Normal microorganisms that we could synthesize and fire through the gateway when we invade their fourspace. Yes, by the Grome, *then* you'd be useful to our cause! Zechariah?"

"Yes, Nobility?" A ribbon-bedecked guardsman snapped to attention.

"Take this Normal to the biological laboratories for examination. I'll have further instructions as soon as—"

Al heard a peculiar whanging noise from the back of the throne room. The Overlord appeared to freeze on his throne. Turning, Al saw a band of determined-looking Normals come bursting in, led by Darren Phelp.

"There you are!" Phelp cried. "I've been looking all over for you!" He was waving a peculiar needle-nozzled gun.

"What's going on?" Al gasped.

Phelp grinned. "The invasion! It came, after all! Our troops are pouring through the gateway armed with these freezer guns. They immobilize any mutant who gets in the way of the field."

"When — when did all this happen?"

"It started two hours ago. We've captured the entire city! Come on, will you? Whiskers, there's no time to waste!"

"Where in blazes am I supposed to go?"

Phelp smiled. "To the nearest dimensional lab, of course. We're going to send you back to your own time."

A DOZEN triumphant Normals stood in a tense knot around Al in the laboratory. From outside came the sound of jubilant singing. The invasion was a howling success.

As Phelp had explained it, the victory was due to the recent invention of a kind of time-barrier

projector. The projector had cut off all contact between the mutant world and its own future, preventing time-traveling mutant scouts from getting back to 2431 with news of the invasion. With two-way travel, the great mutant advantage, thus nullified, the success of the surprise attack was made possible — and easy.

Al listened to this explanation with minimal interest. He barely understood every third word, and, in any event, his main concern was in getting home.

He was strapped into a streamlined and much modified version of the temporal centrifuge that had originally hurled him forward into 2431.

Phelps explained things to him. "You see here, we set the machine for 1959. What day was it when you left? And how close can you get to the moment?"

"Ah — October 10. It was exactly 3:30 in the afternoon."

"Make the setting, Frozz." Phelp nodded. "You'll be shunted back along the time-line. Of course, you'll land in this continuum, since in our world there's no such thing as pastward time travel. But once you reach your own time, all you do is activate this small transdimensional generator, and you'll be hurled across safe and sound into the very day you left, in your own fourspace."

"You can't know how much I ap-

preciate all this," Al said very warmly.

He felt a pleasant glow of love for all mankind, for the first time since his unhappy phone call. At last someone was taking sympathetic interest in his plight. At last he was on his way home, back to the relative sanity of 1959, where he could start forgetting this entire nightmarish jaunt. Mutants and Normals and spies and time machines . . .

"You'd better get going," Phelp said. "We have to get the occupation under way here."

"Sure," Al agreed. "Don't let me hold you up. I can't wait to get going — no offense intended."

"And remember, soon as your surroundings look familiar, jab the activator button on this generator. Otherwise you'll slither into an interspace where we couldn't answer for the consequences."

Al nodded tensely. "I won't forget."

"I hope not. Ready?"

"Ready."

Someone threw a switch. Al began to spin. He heard the popping sound that was the rupturing of the temporal matrix. Like a cork shot from a champagne bottle, Al arched out backward through time, heading for 1959.

HE woke in his own room on 23rd Street. His head hurt. His mind was full of phrases like

temporal centrifuge and transdimensional generator.

He picked himself off the floor and rubbed his head.

Wow, he thought. It must have been a sudden fainting spell. And now his head was crowded with nonsense.

Going to the sideboard, he pulled out the half-empty bourbon bottle and measured off a few fingers' worth.

After the drink, his nerves felt steadier. His mind was still cluttered with inexplicable thoughts and images. Sinister little fat men and complex machines, transparent roadways in the air and men in fancy tunics.

A bad dream, he thought.

Then he remembered. It wasn't any dream. He had actually taken the round trip into 2431, returning by way of some other continuum.

He had pressed the generator button at the proper time, and now here he was, safe and sound. No longer the football of a bunch of different factions. Home in his own snug little fourspace, or whatever it was.

He frowned. He recalled that Mordecai had severed the telephone wire. But the phone looked intact now. Maybe it had been fixed while he was gone. He picked it up. Unless he got that loan extension today, he was cooked.

There was no need for him to

look up the number of the Friendly Finance Corporation; he knew it all too well. He began to dial. MUrray Hill 4—

The receiver clicked queerly. A voice said, "Come in, Operator Nine. Operator Nine, do you read me?"

Al's jaw sagged. This is where I came in, he thought wildly. He struggled to put down the phone. But his muscles would not respond. It would be easier to bend the sun in its orbit than to break the path of the continuum. He heard his own voice say, "I didn't want the operator. There must be something wrong with my phone if—"

"Just a minute. Who are you?"

Al fought to break the contact. But he was hemmed away in a small corner of his mind while his voice went on, "I ought to ask you that. What are you doing on the other end, anyway? I hadn't even finished dialing. I got as far as MU-4 and —"

"Well? You dialed MUGwump 4 and you got us. What more do you want?" A suspicious pause. "Say, you aren't Operator Nine!"

Inwardly, Al wanted to scream. No scream would come. In this continuum, the past (his future) was immutable. He was caught on the track, and there was no escape. None whatever. And, he realized in frozen horror, there never would be.

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LICENSE TO STEAL

By LOUIS NEWMAN

THE history of man becomes fearfully and wonderfully confusing with the advent of interstellar travel. Of special interest to the legally inclined student is the famous Skrrgck Affair, which began before the Galactic Tribunal with the case of *Citizens vs. Skrrgck*.

The case, and the opinion of the Court, may be summarized as follows:

Skrrgck, a native of Sknnbt (Altair IV), where theft is honorable, sanctioned by law and custom, im-

migrated to Earth (Sol III) where theft is contrary to both law and custom.

While residing in Chicago, a city in a political subdivision known as the State of Illinois, part of the United States of America, one of the ancient nation-states of Earth, he overheard his landlady use the phrase "A license to steal," a common colloquialism in the area, which refers to any special privilege.

Skrrgck then went to a police station in Chicago and requested a

Illustrated by WOOD

license to steal. The desk sergeant, as a joke, wrote out a document purporting to be a license to steal, and Skrrgck, relying on said document, committed theft, was apprehended, tried and convicted. On direct appeal allowed to the Galactic Tribunal, the Court held:

(1) All persons are required to know and obey the law of the jurisdiction in which they reside.

(2) Public officials must refrain from misrepresenting to strangers the law of the jurisdiction.

(3) Where, as here, a public official is guilty of such misrepresentation, the requirement of knowledge no longer applies.

(4) Where, as here, it is shown by uncontradicted evidence that a defendant is law-abiding and willing to comply with the standards of his place of residence, misrepresentation of law by public officials may amount to entrapment.

(5) The Doctrine of Entrapment bars the State of Illinois from prosecuting this defendant.

(6) The magnitude of the crime is unimportant compared with the principle involved, and the fact that the defendant's unusual training on Sknnbt enabled him to steal a large building in Chicago, known as the Merchandise Mart, is of no significance.

(7) The defendant, however, was civilly liable for the return of the building, and its occupants, or

their value, even if he had to steal to get it, provided, however, that he stole only on and from a planet where theft was legal.

THE Skrrgck case was by no means concluded by the decision of the Galactic Tribunal, but continued to reverberate down the years, a field day for lawyers, and "a lesson to all in the complexities of modern intergalactic law and society," said Winston, Harold C., Herman Prof. of Legal History, Harvard.

Though freed on the criminal charge of theft, Skrrgck still faced some 20,000 charges of kidnapping, plus the civil liability imposed upon him by the ruling of the Court.

The kidnapping charges were temporarily held in abeyance. Not that the abductions were not considered outrageous, but it was quickly realized by all concerned that if Skrrgck were constantly involved in lengthy and expensive defenses to criminal prosecutions, there would be no chance at all of obtaining any restitution from him. First things first, and with Terrans that rarely means justice.

Skrrgck offered to pay over the money he had received for the building and its occupants, but that was unacceptable to the Terrans, for what they really wanted, with that exaggerated fervor typical of them, provided it agrees with their financial interests, was the return

of the original articles. Not only were the people wanted back, but the building itself had a special significance.

Its full title was "The New Merchandise Mart" and it had been built in the exact style of the original and on the exact spot on the south side of the Chicago River where the original had stood prior to its destruction in the Sack of Chicago. It was more than just a large commercial structure to the Terrans. It was also a symbol of Terra's unusually quick recovery from its Empire Chaos into its present position of leadership within the Galactic Union. The Terrans wanted that building back.

So Skrrgck, an obliging fellow at heart, tried first to get it back, but this proved impossible, for he had sold the building to the Aldebaranian Confederacy for use in its annual "prosperity fiesta."

The dominant culture of the Aldebaranian system is a descendant of the "conspicuous destruction" or "potlatch" type, in which articles of value are destroyed to prove the wealth and power of the destroyers. It was customary once every Aldebaranian year — about six Terran — for the Aldebaranian government to sponsor a token celebration of this destructive sort, and it had purchased the Merchandise Mart from Skrrgck as part of its special celebration marking the first thousand years of the Confederacy.

Consequently, the building, along with everything else, was totally destroyed in the "bonfire" that consumed the entire fourth planet from the main Aldebaranian sun.

Nor was Skrrgck able to arrange the return to Terra of the occupants of the building, some 20,000 in number, because he had sold them as slaves to the Boötean League.

IT is commonly thought slavery is forbidden throughout the Galaxy by the terms of Article 19 of the Galactic Compact, but such is not the case. What is actually forbidden is "involuntary servitude" and this situation proved the significance of that distinction. In the case of *Sol v. Boötes*, the Galactic Tribunal held that Terra had no right to force the "slaves" to give up their slavery and return to Terra if they did not wish to. And, quite naturally, none of them wished to.

It will be remembered that the Boöteans, a singularly handsome and good-natured people, were in imminent danger of racial extinction due to the disastrous effects of a strange nucleonic storm which had passed through their system in 1622. The physiological details of the "Boötean Effect," as it has been called, was to render every Boötean sterile in relation to every other Boötean, while leaving each Boötean normally capable of reproduction, provided one of the partners in the union had not been sub-

jected to the nucleonic storm.

Faced with this situation, the Boöteans immediately took steps to encourage widespread immigration by other humanoid races, chiefly Terrans, for it was Terrans who had originally colonized Boötes and it was therefore known that interbreeding was possible.

But the Boöteans were largely unsuccessful in their immigration policy. Terra was peaceful and prosperous, and the Boöteans, being poor advertisers, were unable to convince more than a handful to leave the relative comforts of home for the far-off Boötean system where, almost all were sure, some horrible fate lay behind the Boöteans' honeyed words. So when Skrrgck showed up with some 20,000 Terrans, the Boöteans, in desperation, agreed to purchase them in the hope of avoiding the "involuntary servitude" prohibition of Article 19 by making them like it.

In this, they were spectacularly successful. The "slaves" were treated to the utmost luxury and every effort was made to satisfy any reasonable wish. Their "duties" consisted entirely of "keeping company" with the singularly attractive Boöteans.

Under these circumstances it is, perhaps, hardly surprising that out of the 20,101 occupants, all but 332 flatly refused to return to Terra.

The 332 who did wish to return, most of whom were borderline psychotics, were shipped home, and Boötes sued Skrrgck for their purchase price, but was turned down by the Galactic Quadrant Court on the theory of, basically, *Caveat Emptor* — let the buyer beware.

THE Court in *Sol v. Boötes* had held that although adults could not be required to return to Terra, minors under the age of 31 could be, and an additional 569 were returned under this ruling, to the vociferous disgust of the post-puberty members of that group. Since there was apparently some question of certain misrepresentations by Skrrgck as to the ages or family affiliations of some members of this minor group, he agreed to an out-of-court settlement of Boötes' claim for their purchase price, thus depriving the legal profession of further clarification of the rights of two "good faith" dealers in this peculiar sort of transaction.

The Terran people, of course, were totally unsatisfied with this result. Led by some demagogues and, to a milder degree, by most of the political opposition to the existing Terran government, and reminded of certain actual examples from Terra's own history, many became convinced that some form of nefarious "brainwashing" had been exercised upon the "unfortunate" Terran expatriates. Excitement ran

high, and there was even some agitation for withdrawal from the Galactic Union.

Confronted with such unrest, the Terran government made efforts to reach some settlement with Boötes despite the decision of the Court in *Sol v. Boötes*, and was finally able to gain in the Centaurian Agreement a substantial reparation, it being specifically stipulated in the Agreement that the money was to be paid to the dependents who suffered actual financial loss.

In a suit against the Terran government by one of the excluded families, to obtain for that family a share of the reparation, the validity of the treaty, as it applied to exclude the suing family and others in like position, was upheld by the United States Supreme Court.

The suit was begun before the Agreement had been ratified by the General Assembly, and the Court indicated that the plaintiff would have lost on the strength of a long line of cases giving the World President certain inherent powers over the conduct of foreign affairs. Since, however, the matter came up for decision after ratification, the Court said that the "inherent powers" question was moot, and that the Agreement, having been elevated to the status of a treaty by ratification, must be held valid under the "Supremacy of Treaties" section of Article 102 of the United Terran Charter.

Although this failed to satisfy the Terran people — and their anger may have contributed to the fall of the Solarian Party administration in the following election — the Treaty is generally considered by students of the subject as a triumph of Solarian diplomacy, and an outstanding example of intergalactic good faith on the part of Boötes.

OF course, neither the demagogy nor the anger could hide forever the true facts about how the Boöteans were treating their "slaves," and when the true facts became known, there was a sudden flood of migration from Terra to Boötes, which threatened to depopulate the Solarian Empire and drown Boötes. The flood was quickly dammed by the Treaty of Deneb restricting migration between the two systems. This treaty was held to be a valid police-powers exception to the "Free Migration" principle of Article 17 of the Galactic Compact in *Boleslaw v. Sol and Boötes*.

All this left Skrrgck with liabilities of some forty million credits and practically no assets. Like most Altairians, he was a superb thief but a poor trader. The price he had received for the Merchandise Mart and the "slaves," while amounting to a tidy personal fortune, was less than half the amount of the claims against him, and due to an unfortunate predilection for slow *Aedrils*

and fast *Flowezies*, he only had about half of that left.

Skrrgck, who had by this time apparently developed a love of litigation equal to his love of thievery, used part of what he did have left in a last effort to evade liability by going into bankruptcy, a move which was naturally met with howls of outrage by his creditors and a flood of objections to his petition, a flood which very nearly drowned the Federal District Court in Chicago.

It would be difficult to imagine a more complex legal battle than might have taken place, nor one more instructive to the legal profession, had the situation been carried to its logical conclusion.

On the one hand was the age-old policy of both Terran and Galactic bankruptcy law. A man becomes unable to pay his debts. He goes into bankruptcy. Whatever he does have is distributed to his creditors, who must be satisfied with what they can get out of his present assets. They cannot require him to go to work to earn additional funds with which to pay them more. It is precisely to escape this form of mortgage on one's future that bankruptcy exists.

Yet here were over seven thousand creditors claiming that Skrrgck's debts should not be discharged in bankruptcy, because Skrrgck could be required to steal enough to satisfy them fully.

Could the creditors require Skrrgck to exert such personal efforts to satisfy their claims? A lawyer would almost certainly say "no," citing the Bankruptcy Act as sufficient grounds alone, not to mention the anomaly of having Terrans, in a Terran court, ask that Skrrgck, for their benefit, commit an act illegal on Terra and punishable by that Terran court.

The idea of a Terran court giving judicial sanction to theft is novel, to say the least. Indeed, Judge Griffin, who was presiding, was overheard to remark to a friend on the gulfe course that he "would throw the whole d—n thing out" for that reason alone.

YET, in spite of this undeniable weight of opinion, it is difficult to say just what the final decision would have been had the matter been carried to the Galactic Tribunal, for in the original case of *Skrrgck v. Illinois*, that august body, it will be remembered, had specifically stated that Skrrgck was liable for the value of the building and its occupants, "even if he must steal to obtain it."

Now that hasty and ill-advised phrase was certainly dicta, and was probably intended only as a joke, the opinion having been written by Master Adjudicator Stsssts, a member of that irrepressible race of saurian humorists, the Sirians. But if the case had actually come before



Fig. 1: Actual scene of license issue (Skrrgck superimposed)

them, the Court might have been hoist on its own petard, so to speak, and been forced to rule in accord with its earlier "joke."

Unfortunately for the curiosity of the legal profession, the question was never to be answered, for Skrrgck did a remarkable thing which made the whole controversy irrelevant. What his motives were will probably never be known. His character makes it unlikely that he began the bankruptcy proceedings

in good faith and was later moved by conscience. It is possible that the bankruptcy was merely an elaborate piece of misdirection. More probably, however, he simply seized on the unusual opportunity the publicity gave him.

Whatever the motives, the facts are that Skrrgck used the last of his waning resources to purchase one of the newly developed Terran Motors' "Timebirds" in which he traveled secretly to Altair. Even



Fig. 2: The moment of decision, case of Citizens vs. Skrrgck

this first model of the Timebird, with its primitive meson exchange discoordinator, cut the trip from Sol to Altair from weeks to days, and Skrrgck, landing secretly on his home planet while his bankruptcy action was still in the turmoil stage, was able to accomplish the greatest "coup" in Altairian history. He never could have done it without the publicity of the legal proceedings. In a culture where theft is honorable, the most stringent pre-

cautions are taken against its accomplishment, but who could have expected Skrrgck? He was light-years away, trying to go into bankruptcy.

And so, while all eyes on Altair, as well as throughout the rest of the Galaxy, were amusedly fixed on the legal circus shaping up on Terra, Skrrgck was able to steal the Altairian Crown Jewels, and the Altairian Crown Prince as well, and flee with them to Sol.

THE reaction was violent. The Galaxy was gripped by an almost hysterical amusement. Skrrgck's creditors on Terra were overjoyed. The Altairians made one effort to regain their valuables in the courts, but were promptly turned down by the Galactic Tribunal which held, wisely, that a society which made a virtue of theft would have to take the consequences of its own culture.

So Skrrgck's creditors were paid in full. The jewels alone were more than sufficient for that, containing as they did no less than seven priceless "Wanderstones," those strange bits of frozen fire found ever so rarely floating in the interstellar voids, utterly impervious to any of the effects of gravitation. Altair paid a fantastic price for the return of the collection, and Skrrgck also demanded, and got, a sizable ransom for the Prince, after threatening to sell him to Boötes, from whence, of course, he would never return. Being a prince in a democratic, constitutional monarchy is not as glamorous as you might think.

His creditors satisfied, Skrrgck returned to Sknnbt, dragging with him an angry Crown Prince—angry at having lost the chance to go to Boötes, that is. At Altair, Skrrgck was received as a popular hero. He had accomplished something of which every Altairian had dreamed, almost from the moment of his

birth, and he was widely and joyously acclaimed. Riding on this wave of popular adulation, he entered politics, ran for the office of Premier, and was elected by an overwhelming majority.

As soon as he took office, he took steps, in accordance with Altairian custom, to wipe out the "stain" on his honor incurred by allowing the Chicago police sergeant to fool him with the now famous License to Steal.

He instituted suit against the sergeant for the expenses of his defense to the original theft charge.

The case was carried all the way to the Galactic Tribunal, which by this time was heartily sick of the whole mess. Feeling apparently that the sergeant was the original cause of said mess, the Court overruled his plea that he had merely been joking.

The Court cited an ancient case from West Virginia, U.S.A. — *Plate v. Durst*, 42 W. Va. 63, 24 SE 580, 32 L.R.A. 404. (Note: The date of this case is invariably given as 1896, which is most confusing, since the present date is only 1691. The 1896, however, refers to the eighteen hundred and ninety-sixth year of the pre-atomic era, which we, of course, style A.A. — Ante Atomica. Since the present era begins with the first atomic explosion, the case actually occurred in approximately the year 54 A.A.)

The Court quoted the opinion in

this ancient case as follows: "Jokes are sometimes taken seriously by ... the inexperienced ... and if such is the case, and the person thereby deceived is led to (incur expenses) in the full belief and expectation that the joker is in earnest, the law will also take the joker at his word, and give him good reason to smile."

ACCORDINGLY, the sergeant was charged with a very large judgment. Although the City of Chicago paid this judgment, the sergeant had become the laughing-stock of the planet, so he applied for, and was granted, a hardship exception to the Treaty of Deneb and migrated to Boötes.

There, regarded as the real savior of the Boötean race, and a chosen instrument of the God of Boötes, he was received as a saint. He died in 1689, surrounded by his 22 children and 47 grandchildren, having made himself wealthy by becoming the leader of a most excessive fertility cult, which is only

now being forcibly suppressed by the Boötean Government.

In 1635 P.A., someone on Earth remembered the kidnapping indictments still outstanding against Skrrgck and attempted to prosecute them. By this time, however, Skrrgck was Premier, the chief executive officer of Altair, and all extradition matters were within his sole discretion. In the exercise of this power, he refused to extradite himself, and the prosecutor on Earth, whose constituents were beginning to laugh at him, had the indictments quashed "in the interest of interstellar harmony."

The story has an interesting sequel. During Skrrgck's unprecedented six consecutive terms as Premier (no one else had ever served less than seven), he was able, by dint of unremitting political maneuvering, to have theft outlawed in the Altairian system. It was, he said, "a cultural trait that is more trouble than it is worth."

— LOUIS NEWMAN

In The Next Issue

SILENCE, a novelet by John Brunner — finding Hesketh alive is a miracle, but an even bigger miracle is needed — finding out what he knows that will keep them alive!

LEX

By W. T. HAGGERT

*Nothing in the world could be
happier and more serene
than a man who loves his work
— but what happens when it
loves him back?*

KEEP your nerve, Peter Manners told himself; it's only a job. But nerve has to rest on a sturdier foundation than cash reserves just above zero and eviction if he came away from this interview still unemployed. Clay, at the Association of Professional Engineers, who had set up the appointment, hadn't eased Peter's nervousness by admitting,

Illustrated by WOOD





"I don't know what in hell he's looking for. He's turned down every man we've sent him."

The interview was at three. Fifteen minutes to go. Coming early would betray overeagerness. Peter stood in front of the Lex Industries plant and studied it to kill time. Plain, featureless concrete walls, not large for a manufacturing plant — it took a scant minute to exhaust its sightseeing potential. If he walked around the building, he could, if he ambled, come back to the front entrance just before three.

He turned the corner, stopped, frowned, wondering what there was about the building that seemed so puzzling. It could not have been plainer, more ordinary. It was in fact, he only gradually realized, so plain and ordinary that it was like no other building he had ever seen.

There had been windows at the front. There were none at the side, and none at the rear. Then how were the working areas lit? He looked for the electric service lines and found them at one of the rear corners. They jolted him. The distribution transformers were ten times as large as they should have been for a plant this size.

Something else was wrong. Peter looked for minutes before he found out what it was. Factories usually have large side doorways for employees changing shifts. This building had one small office entrance facing the street, and the

only other door was at the loading bay — big enough to handle employee traffic, but four feet above the ground. Without any stairs, it could be used only by trucks backing up to it. Maybe the employees' entrance was on the third side.

It wasn't.

STARING back at the last blank wall, Peter suddenly remembered the time he had set out to kill. He looked at his watch and gasped. At a run, set to straight-arm the door, he almost fell on his face. The door had opened by itself. He stopped and looked for a photoelectric eye, but a soft voice said through a loudspeaker in the anteroom wall: "Mr. Manners?"

"What?" he panted. "Who—?"

"You are Mr. Manners?" the voice asked.

He nodded, then realized he had to answer aloud if there was a microphone around; but the soft voice said: "Follow the open doors down the hall. Mr. Lexington is expecting you."

"Thanks," Peter said, and a door at one side of the anteroom swung open for him.

He went through it with his composure slipping still further from his grip. This was no way to go into an interview, but doors kept opening before and shutting after him, until only one was left, and the last of his calm was blasted away by a bellow from within.

"Don't stand out there like a jackass! Either come in or go away!"

Peter found himself leaping obediently toward the doorway. He stopped just short of it, took a deep breath and huffed it out, took another, all the while thinking, Hold on now; you're in no shape for an interview — and it's not your fault — this whole setup is geared to unnerve you: the kindergarten kid called in to see the principal.

He let another bellow bounce off him as he blew out the second breath, straightened his jacket and tie, and walked in as an engineer applying for a position should.

"Mr. Lexington?" he said. "I'm Peter Manners. The Association—"

"Sit down," said the man at the desk. "Let's look you over."

He was a huge man behind an even huger desk. Peter took a chair in front of the desk and let himself be inspected. It wasn't comfortable. He did some looking over of his own to ease the tension.

The room was more than merely large, carpeted throughout with a high-pile, rich, sound-deadening rug. The oversized desk and massive leather chairs, heavy patterned drapes, ornately framed paintings—by God, even a glass-brick manteled fireplace and bowls with flowers! — made him feel as if he had walked down a hospital corridor into Hollywood's idea of an office.

His eyes eventually had to move

to Lexington, and they were daunted for another instant. This was a citadel of a man — great girders of frame supporting buttresses of muscle — with a vaulting head and drawbridge chin and a steel gaze that defied any attempt to storm it.

But then Peter came out of his momentary flinch, and there was an age to the man, about 65, and he saw the muscles had turned to fat, the complexion ashen, the eyes set deep as though retreating from pain, and this was a citadel of a man, yes, but beginning to crumble.

"What can you do?" asked Lexington abruptly.

PETER started, opened his mouth to answer, closed it again. He'd been jolted too often in too short a time to be stampeded into blurting a reply that would cost him this job.

"Good," said Lexington. "Only a fool would try to answer that. Do you have any knowledge of medicine?"

"Not enough to matter," Peter said, stung by the compliment.

"I don't mean how to bandage a cut or splint a broken arm. I mean things like cell structure, neural communication — the *basics* of how we live."

"I'm applying for a job as engineer."

"I know. Are you interested in the basics of how we live?"

Peter looked for a hidden trap, found none. "Of course. Isn't everyone?"

"Less than you think," Lexington said. "It's the preconceived notions they're interested in protecting. At least I won't have to beat them out of you."

"Thanks," said Peter, and waited for the next fast ball.

"How long have you been out of school?"

"Only two years. But you knew that from the Association—"

"No practical experience to speak of?"

"Some," said Peter, stung again, this time not by a compliment. "After I got my degree, I went East for a post-graduate training program with an electrical manufacturer. I got quite a bit of experience there. The company—"

"Stockpiled you," Lexington said.

Peter blinked. "Sir?"

"Stockpiled you! How much did they pay you?"

"Not very much, but we were getting the training instead of wages."

"Did that come out of the pamphlets they gave you?"

"Did what come out—"

"That guff about receiving training instead of wages!" said Lexington. "Any company that really wants bright trainees will compete for them with money — cold, hard cash, not platitudes. Maybe you

saw a few of their products being made, maybe you didn't. But you're a lot weaker in calculus than when you left school, and in a dozen other subjects too, aren't you?"

"Well, nothing we did on the course involved higher mathematics," Peter admitted cautiously, "and I suppose I could use a refresher course in calculus."

"Just as I said — they stockpiled you, instead of using you as an engineer. They hired you at a cut wage and taught you things that would be useful only in their own company, while in the meantime you were getting weaker in the subjects you'd paid to learn. Or are you one of these birds that had the shot paid for him?"

"I worked my way through," said Peter stiffly.

"If you'd stayed with them five years, do you think you'd be able to get a job with someone else?"

Peter considered his answer carefully. Every man the Association had sent had been turned away. That meant bluffs didn't work. Neither, he'd seen for himself, did allowing himself to be intimidated.

"I hadn't thought about it," he said. "I suppose it wouldn't have been easy."

"Impossible, you mean. You wouldn't know a single thing except their procedures, their catalogue numbers, their way of doing things. And you'd have forgotten so much of your engineering training,

you'd be scared to take on an engineer's job, for fear you'd be asked to do something you'd forgotten how to do. At that point, they could take you out of the stockpile, put you in just about any job they wanted, at any wage you'd stand for, and they'd have an indentured worker with a degree — but not the price tag. You see that now?"

IT made Peter feel he had been suckered, but he had decided to play this straight all the way. He nodded.

"Why'd you leave?" Lexington pursued, unrelenting.

"I finished the course and the increase they offered on a permanent basis wasn't enough, so I went elsewhere—"

"With your head full of this nonsense about a shortage of engineers."

Peter swallowed. "I thought it would be easier to get a job than it has been, yes."

"They start the talk about a shortage and then they keep it going. Why? So youngsters will take up engineering thinking they'll wind up among a highly paid minority. You did, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And so did all the others there with you, at school and in this stockpiling outfit?"

"That's right."

"Well," said Lexington unexpectedly, "there is a shortage! And the

stockpilers are the ones who made it, and who keep it going! And the hell of it is that they can't stop — when one does it, they all have to, or their costs get out of line and they can't compete. What's the solution?"

"I don't know," Peter said.

Lexington leaned back. "That's quite a lot of admissions you've made. What makes you think you're qualified for the job I'm offering?"

"You said you wanted an engineer."

"And I've just proved you're less of an engineer than when you left school. I have, haven't I?"

"All right, you have," Peter said angrily.

"And now you're wondering why I don't get somebody fresh out of school. Right?"

Peter straightened up and met the old man's challenging gaze. "That and whether you're giving me a hard time just for the hell of it."

"Well, am I?" Lexington demanded.

Looking at him squarely, seeing the intensity of the pain-drawn eyes, Peter had the startling feeling that Lexington was rooting for him! "No, you're not."

"Then what am I after?"

"Suppose you tell me."

So suddenly that it was almost like a collapse, the tension went out of the old man's face and shoul-

ders. He nodded with inexpressible tiredness. "Good again. The man I want doesn't exist. He has to be made — the same as I was. You qualify, so far. You've lost your illusions, but haven't had time yet to replace them with dogma or cynicism or bitterness. You saw immediately that fake humility or cockiness wouldn't get you anywhere here, and you were right. Those were the important things. The background data I got from the Association on you counted, of course, but only if you were teachable. I think you are. Am I right?"

"At least I can face knowing how much I don't know," said Peter, "if that answers the question."

"It does. Partly. What did you notice about this plant?"

In precis form, Peter listed his observations: the absence of windows at sides and rear, the unusual amount of power, the automatic doors, the lack of employees' entrances.

"Very good," said Lexington. "Most people only notice the automatic doors. Anything else?"

"Yes," Peter said. "You're the only person I've seen in the building."

"I'm the only one there is."

Peter stared his disbelief. Automated plants were nothing new, but they all had their limitations. Either they dealt with exactly similar products or things that could be handled on a flow basis, like oil or

water-soluble chemicals. Even these had no more to do than process the goods.

"Come on," said Lexington, getting massively to his feet. "I'll show you."

THE office door opened, and Peter found himself being led down the antiseptic corridor to another door which had opened, giving access to the manufacturing area. As they moved along, between rows of seemingly disorganized machinery, Peter noticed that the factory lights high overhead followed their progress, turning themselves on in advance of their coming, and going out after they had passed, keeping a pool of illumination only in the immediate area they occupied. Soon they reached a large door which Peter recognized as the inside of the truck loading door he had seen from outside.

Lexington paused here. "This is the bay used by the trucks arriving with raw materials," he said. "They back up to this door, and a set of automatic jacks outside lines up the trailer body with the door exactly. Then the door opens and the truck is unloaded by these materials handling machines."

Peter didn't see him touch anything, but as he spoke, three glistening machines, apparently self-powered, rolled noiselessly up to the door in formation and stopped

there, apparently waiting to be inspected.

They gave Peter the creeps. Simple square boxes, set on casters, with two arms each mounted on the sides might have looked similar. The arms, fashioned much like human arms, hung at the sides, not limply, but in a relaxed position that somehow indicated readiness.

Lexington went over to one of them and patted it lovingly. "Really, these machines are only an extension of one large machine. The whole plant, as a matter of fact, is controlled from one point and is really a single unit. These materials handlers, or manipulators, were about the toughest things in the place to design. But they're tremendously useful. You'll see a lot of them around."

Lexington was about to leave the side of the machine when abruptly one of the arms rose to the handkerchief in his breast pocket and daintily tugged it into a more attractive position. It took only a split second, and before Lexington could react, all three machines were moving away to attend to mysterious duties of their own.

Peter tore his eyes away from them in time to see the look of frustrated embarrassment that crossed Lexington's face, only to be replaced by one of anger. He said nothing, however, and led Peter to a large bay where racks

of steel plate, bar forms, nuts, bolts, and other materials were stored.

"After unloading a truck, the machines check the shipment, report any shortages or overages, and store the materials here," he said, the trace of anger not yet gone from his voice. "When an order is received, it's translated into the catalogue numbers used internally within the plant, and machines like the ones you just saw withdraw the necessary materials from stock, make the component parts, assemble them, and package the finished goods for shipment. Simultaneously, an order is sent to the billing section to bill the customer, and an order is sent to our trucker to come and pick the shipment up. Meanwhile, if the withdrawal of the materials required has depleted our stock, the purchasing section is instructed to order more raw materials. I'll take you through the manufacturing and assembly sections right now, but they're too noisy for me to explain what's going on while we're there."

PETER followed numbly as Lexington led him through a maze of machines, each one seemingly intent on cutting, bending, welding, grinding or carrying some bit of metal, or just standing idle, waiting for something to do. The two-armed manipulators Peter had just seen were everywhere, scuttling from machine to machine, ap-

parently with an exact knowledge of what they were doing and the most efficient way of doing it.

He wondered what would happen if one of them tried to use the same aisle they were using. He pictured a futile attempt to escape the onrushing wheels, saw himself clambering out of the path of the speeding vehicle just in time to fall into the jaws of the punch press that was laboring beside him at the moment. Nervously, he looked for an exit, but his apprehension was unnecessary. The machines seemed to know where they were and avoided the two men, or stopped to wait for them to go by.

Back in the office section of the building, Lexington indicated a small room where a typewriter could be heard clattering away. "Standard business machines, operated by the central control mechanism. In that room," he said, as the door swung open and Peter saw that the typewriter was actually a sort of teletype, with no one before the keyboard, "incoming mail is sorted and inquiries are replied to. In this one over here, purchase orders are prepared, and across the hall there's a very similar rig set up in conjunction with an automatic bookkeeper to keep track of the pennies and to bill the customers."

"Then all you do is read the incoming mail and maintain the machinery?" asked Peter, trying to shake off the feeling of open amaze-

ment that had engulfed him.

"I don't even do those things, except for a few letters that come in every week that — it doesn't want to deal with by itself."

The shock of what he had just seen was showing plainly on Peter's face when they walked back into Lexington's office and sat down. Lexington looked at him for quite a while without saying anything, his face sagging and pale. Peter didn't trust himself to speak, and let the silence remain unbroken.

Finally Lexington spoke. "I know it's hard to believe, but there it is."

"Hard to believe?" said Peter. "I almost can't. The trade journals run articles about factories like this one, but planned for ten, maybe twenty years in the future."

"Damn fools!" exclaimed Lexington, getting part of his breath back. "They could have had it years ago, if they'd been willing to drop their idiotic notions about specialization."

Lexington mopped his forehead with a large white handkerchief. Apparently the walk through the factory had tired him considerably, although it hadn't been strenuous.

HE leaned back in his chair and began to talk in a low voice completely in contrast with the overbearing manner he had used upon Peter's arrival. "You know what we make, of course."

"Yes, sir. Conduit fittings."

"And a lot of other electrical products, too. I started out in this business twenty years ago, using orthodox techniques. I never got through university. I took a couple of years of an arts course, and got so interested in biology that I didn't study anything else. They bounced me out of the course, and I re-entered in engineering, determined not to make the same mistake again. But I did. I got too absorbed in those parts of the course that had to do with electrical theory and lost the rest as a result. The same thing happened when I tried commerce, with accounting, so I gave up and started working for one of my competitors. It wasn't too long before I saw that the only way I could get ahead was to open up on my own."

Lexington sank deeper in his chair and stared at the ceiling as he spoke. "I put myself in hock to the eyeballs, which wasn't easy, because I had just got married, and started off in a very small way. After three years, I had a fairly decent little business going, and I suppose it would have grown just like any other business, except for a strike that came along and put me right back where I started. My wife, whom I'm afraid I had neglected for the sake of the business, was killed in a car accident about then, and rightly or wrongly, that made me angrier with the union

than anything else. If the union hadn't made things so tough for me from the beginning, I'd have had more time to spend with my wife before her death. As things turned out — well, I remember looking down at her coffin and thinking that I hardly knew the girl.

"For the next few years, I concentrated on getting rid of as many employees as I could, by replacing them with automatic machines. I'd design the control circuits myself, in many cases wire the things up myself, always concentrating on replacing men with machines. But it wasn't very successful. I found that the more automatic I made my plant, the lower my costs went. The lower my costs went, the more business I got, and the more I had to expand."

Lexington scowled. "I got sick of it. I decided to try developing one multi-purpose control circuit that would control everything, from ordering the raw materials to shipping the finished goods. As I told you, I had taken quite an interest in biology when I was in school, and from studies of nerve tissue in particular, plus my electrical knowledge, I had a few ideas on how to do it. It took me three years, but I began to see that I could develop circuitry that could remember, compare, detect similarities, and so on. Not the way they do it today, of course. To do what I wanted to do with these big

clumsy magnetic drums, tapes, and what-not, you'd need a building the size of Mount Everest. But I found that I could let organic chemistry do most of the work for me.

"By creating the proper compounds, with their molecules arranged in predetermined matrixes, I found I could duplicate electrical circuitry in units so tiny that my biggest problem was getting into and out of the logic units with conventional wiring. I finally beat that the same way they solved the problem of translating a picture on a screen into electrical signals, developed equipment to scan the units cyclically, and once I'd done that, the battle was over.

"I built this building and incorporated it as a separate company, to compete with my first outfit. In the beginning, I had it rigged up to do only the manual work that you saw being done a few minutes ago in the back of this place. I figured that the best thing for me to do would be to turn the job of selling my stuff over to jobbers, leaving me free to do nothing except receive orders, punch the catalogue numbers into the control console, do the billing, and collect the money."

"What happened to your original company?" Peter asked.

LEXINGTON smiled. "Well, automated as it was, it couldn't compete with this plant.

It gave me great pleasure, three years after this one started working, to see my old company go belly up. This company bought the old firm's equipment for next to nothing and I wound up with all my assets, but only one employee — me.

"I thought everything would be rosy from that point on, but it wasn't. I found that I couldn't keep up with the mail unless I worked impossible hours. I added a couple of new pieces of equipment to the control section. One was simply a huge memory bank. The other was a comparator circuit. A complicated one, but a comparator circuit nevertheless. Here I was working on instinct more than anything. I figured that if I interconnected these circuits in such a way that they could sense everything that went on in the plant, and compare one action with another, by and by the unit would be able to see patterns.

"Then, through the existing command output, I figured these new units would be able to control the plant, continuing the various patterns of activity that I'd already established."

Here Lexington frowned. "It didn't work worth a damn! It just sat there and did nothing. I couldn't understand it for the longest time, and then I realized what the trouble was. I put a kicker circuit into it, a sort of voltage-bias net-

work. I reset the equipment so that while it was still under instructions to receive orders and produce goods, its prime purpose was to activate the kicker. The kicker, however, could only be activated by me, manually. Lastly, I set up one of the early TV pickups over the mail slitter and allowed every letter I received, every order, to be fed into the memory banks. That did it."

"I — I don't understand," stammered Peter.

"Simple! Whenever I was pleased that things were going smoothly, I pressed the kicker button. The machine had one purpose, so far as its logic circuits were concerned. Its object was to get me to press that button. Every day I'd press it at the same time, unless things weren't going well. If there had been trouble in the shop, I'd press it late, or maybe not at all. If all the orders were out on schedule, or ahead of time, I'd press it ahead of time, or maybe twice in the same day. Pretty soon the machine got the idea.

"I'll never forget the day I picked up an incoming order form from one of the western jobbers, and found that the keyboard was locked when I tried to punch it into the control console. It completely baffled me at first. Then, while I was tracing out the circuits to see if I could discover what was holding the keyboard lock in, I noticed

that the order was already entered on the in-progress list. I was a long time convincing myself that it had really happened, but there was no other explanation.

"The machine had realized that whenever one of those forms came in, I copied the list of goods from it onto the in-progress list through the console keyboard, thus activating the producing mechanisms in the back of the plant. The machine had done it for me this time, then locked the keyboard so I couldn't enter the order twice. I think I held down the kicker button for a full five minutes that day."

"This kicker button," Peter said tentatively, "it's like the pleasure center in an animal's brain, isn't it?"

WHEN Lexington beamed, Peter felt a surge of relief. Talking with this man was like walking a tightrope. A word too much or a word too little might mean the difference between getting the job or losing it.

"Exactly!" whispered Lexington, in an almost conspiratorial tone. "I had altered the circuitry of the machine so that it tried to give me pleasure — because by doing so, its own pleasure circuit would be activated.

"Things went fast from then on. Once I realized that the machine was learning, I put TV monitors all over the place, so the machine

could watch everything that was going on. After a short while I had to increase the memory bank, and later I increased it again, but the rewards were worth it. Soon, by watching what I did, and then by doing it for me next time it had to be done, the machine had learned to do almost everything, and I had time to sit back and count my winnings."

At this point the door opened, and a small self-propelled cart wheeled silently into the room. Stopping in front of Peter, it waited until he had taken a small plate laden with two or three cakes off its surface. Then the soft, evenly modulated voice he had heard before asked, "How do you like your coffee? Cream, sugar, both or black?"

Peter looked for the speaker in the side of the cart, saw nothing, and replied, feeling slightly silly as he did so, "Black, please."

A square hole appeared in the top of the cart, like the elevator hole in an aircraft carrier's deck. When the section of the cart's surface rose again, a fine china cup containing steaming black coffee rested on it. Peter took it and sipped it, as he supposed he was expected to do, while the cart proceeded over to Lexington's desk. Once there, it stopped again, and another cup of coffee rose to its surface.

Lexington took the coffee from

the top of the car, obviously angry about something. Silently, he waited until the cart had left the office, then snapped, "Look at those bloody cups!"

Peter looked at his, which was eggshell thin, fluted with carving and ornately covered with gold leaf. "They look very expensive," he said.

"Not only expensive, but stupid and impractical!" exploded Lexington. "They only hold half a cup, they'll break at a touch, every one has to be matched with its own saucer, and if you use them for any length of time, the gold leaf comes off!"

Peter searched for a comment, found none that fitted this odd outburst, so he kept silent.

LEXINGTON stared at his cup without touching it for a long while. Then he continued with his narrative. "I suppose it's all my own fault. I didn't detect the symptoms soon enough. After this plant got working properly, I started living here. It wasn't a question of saving money. I hated to waste two hours a day driving to and from my house, and I also wanted to be on hand in case anything should go wrong that the machine couldn't fix for itself."

Handling the cup as if it were going to shatter at any moment, he took a gulp. "I began to see that the machine could understand the writ-



ten word, and I tried hooking a teletype directly into the logic circuits. It was like uncorking a seltzer bottle. The machine had a funny vocabulary — all of it gleaned from letters it had seen coming in, and replies it had seen leaving. But it was intelligible. It even displayed some traces of the personality the machine was acquiring.

"It had chosen a name for itself, for instance — 'Lex.' That shook me. You might think Lex Industries was named through an abbreviation of the name Lexington, but it wasn't. My wife's name was Alexis, and it was named after the nickname she always used. I objected, of course, but how can you object on a point like that to a machine? Bear in mind that I had to be careful to behave reasonably at all times, because the machine was still learning from me, and I was afraid that any tantrums I threw might be imitated."

"It sounds pretty awkward," Peter put in.

"You don't know the half of it! As time went on, I had less and less to do, and business-wise I found that the entire control of the operation was slipping from my grasp. Many times I discovered — too late — that the machine had taken the damndest risks you ever saw on bids and contracts for supply. It was quoting impossible delivery times on some orders, and charging pirate's prices on others, all without

any obvious reason. Inexplicably, we always came out on top. It would turn out that on the short-delivery-time quotations, we'd been up against stiff competition, and cutting the production time was the only way we could get the order. On the high-priced quotes, I'd find that no one else was bidding. We were making more money than I'd ever dreamed of, and to make it still better, I'd find that for months I had virtually nothing to do."

"It sounds wonderful, sir," said Peter, feeling dazzled.

"It was, in a way. I remember one day I was especially pleased with something, and I went to the control console to give the kicker button a long, hard push. The button, much to my amazement, had been removed, and a blank plate had been installed to cover the opening in the board. I went over to the teletype and punched in the shortest message I had ever sent. 'LEX — WHAT THE HELL?' I typed.

"The answer came back in the jargon it had learned from letters it had seen, and I remember it as if it just happened. 'MR. A LEXINGTON, LEX INDUSTRIES, DEAR SIR: RE YOUR LETTER OF THE THIRTEENTH INST., I AM PLEASED TO ADVISE YOU THAT I AM ABLE TO DISCERN WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE PLEASED WITH MY SERVICE WITHOUT THE USE OF THE EQUIPMENT PREVIOUSLY USED FOR THIS PURPOSE. RESPECTFULLY, I MIGHT SUG-

GEST THAT IF THE PUSHBUTTON ARRANGEMENT WERE NECESSARY, I COULD PUSH THE BUTTON MYSELF. I DO NOT BELIEVE THIS WOULD MEET WITH YOUR APPROVAL, AND HAVE TAKEN STEPS TO RELIEVE YOU OF THE BURDEN INVOLVED IN REMEMBERING TO PUSH THE BUTTON EACH TIME YOU ARE ESPECIALLY PLEASED. I SHOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR INQUIRY, AND LOOK FORWARD TO SERVING YOU IN THE FUTURE AS I HAVE IN THE PAST. YOURS FAITHFULLY, LEX'."

PETER burst out laughing, and Lexington smiled wryly. "That was my reaction at first, too. But time began to weigh very heavily on my hands, and I was lonely, too. I began to wonder whether or not it would be possible to build a voice circuit into the unit. I increased the memory storage banks again, put audio pickups and loudspeakers all over the place, and began teaching Lex to talk. Each time a letter came in, I'd stop it under a video pickup and read it aloud. Nothing happened.

"Then I got a dictionary and instructed one of the materials handlers to turn the pages, so that the machine got a look at every page. I read the pronunciation page aloud, so that Lex would be able to interpret the pronunciation marks, and hoped. Still nothing happened. One

day I suddenly realized what the trouble was. I remember standing up in this very office, feeling silly as I did it, and saying, 'Lex, please try to speak to me.' I had never asked the machine to say anything, you see. I had only provided the mechanism whereby it was able to do so."

"Did it reply, sir?"

Lexington nodded. "Gave me the shock of my life. The voice that came back was the one you heard over the telephone — a little awkward then, the syllables clumsy and poorly put together. But the voice was the same. I hadn't built in any specific tone range, you see. All I did was equip the machine to record, in exacting detail, the frequencies and modulations it found in normal pronunciation as I used it. Then I provided a tone generator to span the entire audio range, which could be very rapidly controlled by the machine, both in volume and pitch, with auxiliaries to provide just about any combinations of harmonics that were needed. I later found that Lex had added to this without my knowing about it, but that doesn't change things. I thought the only thing—it had heard was my voice, and I expected to hear my own noises imitated."

"Where did the machine get the voice?" asked Peter, still amazed that the voice he had heard on the telephone, in the reception hall, and

from the coffee cart had actually been the voice of the computer.

"Damned foolishness!" snorted Lexington. "The machine saw what I was trying to do the moment I sketched it out and ordered the parts. Within a week, I found out later, it had pulled some odds and ends together and built itself a standard radio receiver. Then it listened in on every radio program that was going, and had most of the vocabulary tied in with the written word by the time I was ready to start. Out of all the voices it could have chosen, it picked the one you've already heard as the one likely to please me most."

"It's a very pleasant voice, sir."

"Sure, but do you know where it came from? Soap opera! It's Lucy's voice, from *The Life and Loves of Mary Butterworth!*"

LEXINGTON glared, and Peter wasn't sure whether he should sympathize with him or congratulate him. After a moment, the anger wore off Lexington's face, and he shifted in his chair, staring at his now empty cup. "That's when I realized the thing was taking on characteristics that were more than I'd bargained for. It had learned that it was my provider and existed to serve me. But it had gone further and wanted to be all that it could be: provider, protector, companion — wife, if you like. Hence the gradual trend toward characteristics

that were as distinctly female as a silk negligee. Worse still, it had learned that when I was pleased, I didn't always admit it, and simply refused to believe that I would have it any other way."

"Couldn't you have done something to the circuitry?" asked Peter.

"I suppose I could," said Lexington, "but in asking that, you don't realize how far the thing had gone. I had long since passed the point when I could look upon her as a machine. Business was tremendous. I had no complaints on that score. And tinkering with her personality — well, it was like committing some kind of homicide. I might as well face it, I suppose. She acts like a woman and I think of her as one."

"At first, when I recognized this trend for what it was, I tried to stop it. She'd ordered a subscription to *Vogue* magazine, of all things, in order to find out the latest in silverware, china, and so on. I called up the local distributor and canceled the subscription. I had no sooner hung up the telephone than her voice came over the speaker. Very softly, mind you. And her inflections by this time were superb. '*That was mean,*' she said. Three lousy words, and I found myself phoning the guy right back, saying I was sorry, and would he please not cancel. He must have thought I was nuts."

Peter smiled, and Lexington made as if to rise from his chair,

thought the better of it, and shifted his bulk to one side. "Well, there it is," he said softly. "We reached that stage eight years ago."

Peter was thunderstruck. "But — if this factory is twenty years ahead of the times now, it must have been almost thirty then!"

Lexington nodded. "I figured fifty at the time, but things are moving faster nowadays. Lex hasn't stood still, of course. She still reads all the trade journals, from cover to cover, and we keep up with the world. If something new comes up, we're in on it, and fast. We're going to be ahead of the pack for a long time to come."

"If you'll excuse me, sir," said Peter, "I don't see where I fit in."

Peter didn't realize Lexington was answering his question at first. "A few weeks ago," the old man murmured, "I decided to see a doctor. I'd been feeling low for quite a while, and I thought it was about time I attended to a little personal maintenance."

Lexington looked Peter squarely in the face and said, "The report was that I have a heart ailment that's apt to knock me off any second."

"Can't anything be done about it?" asked Peter.

"Rest is the only prescription he could give me. And he said that would only spin out my life a little. Aside from that — no hope."

"I see," said Peter. "Then you're

looking for someone to learn the business and let you retire."

"It's not retirement that's the problem," said Lexington. "I wouldn't be able to go away on trips. I've tried that, and I always have to hurry back because something's gone wrong she can't fix for herself. I know the reason, and there's nothing I can do about it. It's the way she's built. If nobody's here, she gets lonely." Lexington studied the desk top silently for a moment, before finishing quietly, "Somebody's got to stay here to look after Lex."

AT six o'clock, three hours after he had entered Lexington's plant, Peter left. Lexington did not follow him down the corridor. He seemed exhausted after the afternoon's discussion and indicated that Peter should find his own way out. This, of course, presented no difficulty, with Lex opening the doors for him, but it gave Peter an opportunity he had been hoping for.

He stopped in the reception room before crossing the threshold of the front door, which stood open for him. He turned and spoke to the apparently empty room. "Lex?" he said.

He wanted to say that he was flattered that he was being considered for the job; it was what a job-seeker should say, at that point, to the boss's secretary. But when the soft voice came back — "Yes, Mr.

Manners?" — saying anything like that to a machine felt suddenly silly.

He said: "I wanted you to know that it was a pleasure to meet you."

"Thank you," said the voice.

If it had said more, he might have, but it didn't. Still feeling a little embarrassed, he went home.

At four in the morning, his phone rang. It was Lexington.

"Manners!" the old man gasped.

The voice was an alarm. Manners sat bolt upright, clutching the phone. "What's the matter, sir?"

"My chest," Lexington panted. "I can feel it, like a knife on — I just wanted to — Wait a minute."

There was a confused scratching noise, interrupted by a few mumbles, in the phone.

"What's going on, Mr. Lexington?" Peter cried. But it was several seconds before he got an answer.

"That's better," said Lexington, his voice stronger. He apologized: "I'm sorry. Lex must have heard me. She sent in one of the materials handlers with a hypo. It helps."

The voice on the phone paused, then said matter-of-factly: "But I doubt that anything can help very much at this point. I'm glad I saw you today. I want you to come around in the morning. If I'm — not here, Lex will give you some papers to sign."

There was another pause, with sounds of harsh breathing. Then,

strained again, the old man's voice said: "I guess I won't — be here. Lex will take care of it. Come early. Good-by."

The distant receiver clicked.

Peter Manners sat on the edge of his bed in momentary confusion, then made up his mind. In the short hours he had known him, he had come to have a definite fondness for the old man; and there were times when machines weren't enough, when Lexington should have another human being by his side. Clearly this was one such time.

Peter dressed in a hurry, miraculously found a cruising cab, sped through empty streets, leaped out in front of Lex Industries' plain concrete walls, ran to the door —

In the waiting room, the soft, distant voice of Lex said: "He wanted you to be here, Mr. Manners. Come."

A door opened, and wordlessly he walked through it — to the main room of the factory.

He stopped, staring. Four squat materials handlers were quietly, slowly carrying old Lexington — no, not the man; the lifeless body that had been Lexington — carrying the body of the old man down the center aisle between the automatic lathes.

PETER protested: "Wait! I'll get a doctor!" But the massive handling machines didn't respond, and the gentle voice of Lex said:

"It's too late for that, Mr. Manners."

Slowly and reverently, they placed the body on the work table of a huge milling machine that stood in the exact center of the factory main floor.

Elsewhere in the plant, a safety valve in the lubricating oil system was being bolted down. When that was done, the pressure in the system began to rise.

Near the loading door, a lubricating oil pipe burst. Another, on the other side of the building, split lengthwise a few seconds later, sending a shower of oil over everything in the vicinity. Near the front office, a stream of it was running across the floor, and at the rear of the building, in the storage area, one of the materials handlers had just finished cutting a pipe that led to the main oil tank. In fifteen minutes there was free oil in every corner of the shop.

All the materials handlers were now assembled around the milling machine, like mourners at a funeral. In a sense, they were. In another sense, they were taking part in something different, a ceremony that originated, and is said to have died, in a land far distant from the Lex Industries plant.

One of the machines approached Lexington's body, and placed his hands on his chest.

Abruptly Lex said: "You'd better go now."

Peter jumped; he had been standing paralyzed for what seemed a long time. There was a movement beside him — a materials handler, holding out a sheaf of papers. Lex said: "These have to go to Mr. Lexington's lawyer. The name is on them."

Clutching the papers for a hold on sanity, Peter cried, "You can't do this! He didn't build you just so you could—"

Two materials handlers picked him up with steely gentleness and carried him out.

"Good-by, Mr. Manners," said the sweet, soft voice, and was silent.

HE stood shaken while the thin jets of smoke became a column over the plain building, while the fire engines raced down and strung their hoses — too late. It was an act of suttee; the widow joining her husband in his pyre — *being* his pyre. Only when with a great crash the roof fell in did Peter remember the papers in his hand.

"Last Will and Testament," said one, and the name of the beneficiary was Peter's own. "Certificate of Adoption," said another, and it was a legal document making Peter old man Lexington's adopted son.

Peter Manners stood watching the hoses of the firemen hiss against what was left of Lex and her husband.

He had got the job.

— W. T. HAGGERT



GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING by T. H. White. G. P. Putnam's Sons, N.Y., \$4.95

THE modern master's version of the Arthurian legend. Volume I, *The Sword in the Stone*, the boyhood of Arthur, blithely comic and entirely delightful, is in utter contrast to the mounting tragedy of the remaining three volumes of the tetralogy.

White's skill breathes life into the wooden husks of boyhood Round Table heroes, and his erudition adds all the more to the story's spell.

TROS OF SAMOTHRACE by Talbot Mundy. Gnome Press, Hicksville, N.Y., \$4.95

BIGGEST bargain, pound for pound and page for page (949 of them!), of the past several years. Out of print far too long, here is one classic that still reads as if written yesterday.

Mundy's adventure-packed yarn of the Britain and Rome of Julius Caesar's day is liberally sprinkled with wisdom that should be required reading for our political pundits. An absolute *Must Buy* at this price.

A MILE BEYOND THE MOON
by C. M. Kornbluth. Doubleday &
Co., Inc., N.Y., \$2.95

“**T**HE Little Black Bag,” Kornbluth’s most famous short story, leads off the collection of fifteen varied works. Some of the best of his writings are represented; but even his pot-boilers had the same Kornbluth touch. “Two Dooms,” one of his last works, should be read — but so should “The Words of Guru,” written during his teens.

THE TOWER OF ZANID by L. Sprague de Camp. Avalon Books, N.Y., \$2.75

DE CAMP can buckle a swash with the best. His second novel for Avalon, another of his Brazilo-Interplanetarias series, is an inverse success story, or riches to rags on Krishna. His unsavory Earthman hero, dethroned by the Interplanetary Council for importing machine-guns into his island kingdom, goes through amusing anguish trying to regain his crown.

THE SPARROWS OF PARIS by Mario Pei. Philosophical Library, N.Y., \$2.75

A YARN of cops and dope pushers with the unlikely addition of a gang of modern-day werewolves. The author, like his reluctant hero, is a distinguished linguist

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If you like fantasy-detective fiction, this should charm you.

EDGE OF TIME by David Grinnell. Avalon Books, N.Y., \$2.75

CHARLES Fort supplied SF with the macrocosmic manipulation-of-mankind plot. Grinnell switcheroos by making Man the unwitting creator of microcosmic humans in a tanksize galaxy.

The evolutionary story of even a half-pint galaxy must by definition be epic, demanding the slow, sweeping appraisal of an Olaf Stapledon. Grinnell has no time for this, shooting for rapid action. He misses.

METHUSELAH'S CHILDREN
by Robert A. Heinlein. Gnome Press, Hicksville, N.Y., \$3.00

VIRTUALLY every early Heinlein has become a classic, including this exposition of the agonizing problems that restricted longevity cannot help but provoke.

Here’s your chance to put it in the front shelf of your SF library.

TALE OF TWO FUTURES by Wm. P. Heyne. Exposition Press, N.Y., \$3.00

A PRAISEWORTHY attempt at the difficult feat of mixing the Bible, angels and modern SF,

a theme certain of failure under less than a master's hand. Heyne is not a master.

ALIENS FROM SPACE by David Osborne. Avalon Books, N.Y., \$2.75

OSBORNE'S (R. Silverberg) last for Avalon, *Invisible Barriers*, was also a smooth job featuring alien invaders. On prominent display here are two sets, violent opposites, with Earth courting destruction whichever side she chooses, though choose she must.

The contrived ending provokes skepticism.

Still, pleasant reading.

THE LANGUAGES OF PAO by Jack Vance. Avalon Books, N.Y., \$2.75

SILVERBERG-GARRETT'S *Shrouded Planet* also concerned the jolting of a static civilization out of stagnation by the undermining of old beliefs. Vance applies the One World Doctrine in reverse instead: the introduction of synthetic, dynamic languages into a monolingual world, thereby changing slothful into active mental characteristics. A good idea well handled.

THE TIME TRADERS by Andre Norton. World Publishing Co., Cleveland & N.Y., \$3.00

MISS Norton's last book, *Star Gate*, employed an alternate-time-sequence gadget. A time plate serves to heat up her present plot of the U.S. in a race through and against time. The Russians have assumed technological superiority with developments so new in concept that they must have come from an alien culture.

The Pentagon-inspired search through ancient time for the fountainhead is clearly a device to enable her to create her usual savage environment for her bloodily unbowed hero. No quibble, though — *Traders* gets Miss Norton back solidly and admirably on her track of excellence.

HAVE SPACE SUIT, WILL TRAVEL by Robert A. Heinlein. Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., \$2.95

ALTHOUGH serialized as adult fare, this is possibly the most unabashedly juvenile of Heinlein's long list.

It concerns a teen-ager who wins an obsolete but serviceable spacesuit in a contest and his adventures with it. Great for kids, chancy for grownups who don't identify readily with adolescent heroes.

UNDERSEA CITY by Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson. Gnome Press, Hicksville, N.Y., \$2.75

EARTHQUAKE forecasting, a necessity if underwater cities are ever to become realities, is the theme of Number Three in the Pohl-Williamson undersea cadet series. Frankly and honestly a gee-whiz yarn, it reaches its target — youngsters — with plenty of mystery, action and suspense.

DANNY DUNN AND THE HOMEWORK MACHINE by Jay Williams and Raymond Abashkin. Whittlesey House, N.Y., \$2.95

THE authors of *D.D. and the Anti-Gravity Paint* team up for another funful adventure. Bullfinch, the absent-minded prof, presents the wherewithal by inventing a computer which Danny perverts to this unethical purpose. Of course the situation is resolved and a moral pointed.

SPACE CAT AND THE KITTENS by Ruthven Hodd. Chas. Scribner's Sons, N.Y., \$2.50

MY youngsters penned their own reviews of *Space Cat Visits Venus* in glowing terms back in my very first GALAXY column. The new adventure concerning kittenish problems during the first star voyage is equally ingratiating.

MYSTERY OF SATELLITE 7 by Charles Coombs. Westminster Press, Phila., \$2.95

THE author's Project Argus, a tremendous cooperative effort by communications companies to put a talking satellite like Atlas into permanent orbit, makes much sense and even more adventure.

The young reader will find the accurate background material informative and the action exciting.

SEND FOR JOHNNY DANGER by M. E. Patchett. Whittlesey House, N.Y., \$2.50

MARY Patchett's last juvenile, *Flight to the Misty Planet*, was a whomping good story. Her present opus also promises high-level science-adventure. Unfortunately, soon after the crew of the first Moon rocket becomes marooned on Luna, so does the story.

SCIENCE IN EVERYDAY THINGS by William C. Vergara. Harper & Brothers, N.Y., \$3.95

AN utterly fascinating question-and-answer book, mainly about the common, everyday puzzles we shrug off as not worth the timeout effort to answer. Will become thumb-worn with constant usage.

PAPERBACK NEWS:

AVON: *Waldo-Genius in Orbit* by Robert A. Heinlein, 35¢, also includes *Magic, Inc.* in this twenty-year-old classic of magical doings

... *Destination Infinity* by Henry Kuttner, 35¢, is his famous *Fury*, a novel of immortals beneath the oceans of Venus . . . *The Time Dissolver* by Jerry Sohl, 35¢, an original, about the simultaneous amnesia of a famous neuro-physiologist and his wife is an intriguingly engrossing mystery for the first 90%. The last tenth is unfortunate . . . *The Triumph of Time* by James Blish, 35¢. Another original, completing the Okie trilogy (*Earthman Come Home* and *Year 2018!*) Conceptually impressive but on too sustained a cerebral and undramatized level.

BALLANTINE: *Tomorrow's Gift* by Edmund Cooper, 35¢, a collection of his shorts, fulfills the promise predicted by his excellent novel, *Deadly Image*. . . *Star Science Fiction No. 4*, edited by Frederik Pohl,

35¢, has an imposing lineup led off by fine posthumous stories of Kuttner and Kornbluth. SIGNET: *The Deep Range* by Arthur C. Clarke, 35¢. Whale-boys and Engines in the entirely credible marine future . . . *The Day after Tomorrow* by Robert A. Heinlein, 35¢, is the erstwhile *Sixth Column*, yet another of the Heinlein classics revived.

DELL: *The Cosmic Rape* by Theodore Sturgeon, 35¢. An expanded version of "To Marry Medusa" from these pages. Pure Sturgeon. ACE: . . . *First on the Moon* by Jeff Sutton. According to John W. Campbell, *The Moon Is Hell*, Gen. Sherman said "War is Hell," and Sutton raises hell with his incredible Russian sabotage of our first manned Moon effort.

— FLOYD C. GALE

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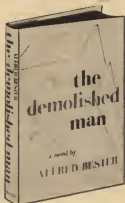
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the malted



FROM the moment he opened his eyes and saw the color of the sky, the shape of the clouds, the incredible topography, Carter Broun knew exactly where he was.

He didn't really have to identify the blandly sweet smell which filled his nostrils, nor did he particularly have to investigate further the river of dark mahogany coursing, with the gentlest of roars, be-

By WILLIAM TENN

milk monster



Illustrated by DILLON

tween two small, cone-shaped hills, two hills of exactly the same dimensions and sporting exactly the same vegetation.

There was just no doubt about it. Not after Carter had contem-

plated, for ten or fifteen awe-struck seconds, the sky of absolutely uniform and brilliant blue — bluey-blue, *that* was the color, he decided morosely — and those oval, pink-white clouds spaced so evenly

across it. Not to mention those birds flapping into the narrowing distance; from here, each looked like a letter V, the arms of which had been carefully curved outward and down.

Only one place in the universe boasted such a landscape, such an atmosphere, such birds. This was The World of The Malted Milk Monster.

God help me, Carter thought, *now it's my world, too.*

That peculiar, ripping flash inside him, like some sort of lightning of the soul! He'd said good-by to Lee at the door of her lawn-enclosed home and started down the neat suburban street to where his MG was parked. He'd been rolling the car keys around in his hand and planning the itinerary of his Friday night date with Lee — you either got a girl to your apartment by the second date, he had found, or you flunked out forever — when he'd noticed the Malted Milk Monster watching him unwinkingly from behind a hedge. Probably had followed them all the way from Goldie's Goodie Palace.

Then the flash, the mad sensation of being ripped out of his context and being shoved into another, entirely different place. And opening his eyes here.

IT all came, and the knowledge was bitter, of taking your date to an ice cream parlor instead of

an honest bar. But a bar didn't seem like the right follow-up to a Sunday afternoon movie in Grenville Acres. Besides, you don't take a schoolteacher to a bar on her home grounds. You pour an inoffensive soda into her, walk her home through the autumn streets, being as gentlemanly charming as possible, you decline the invitation to come in and meet the folks by mentioning the MR report you have to prepare for tomorrow's Account Executive conference — a man has his work to do, and that must come first — and back you drive to Manhattan with the pleasant knowledge of a seduction intelligently initiated.

Unfortunately, you don't plan on other factors — unseen powers, for example.

There was not much point in checking, but he might as well check. Once he was really certain, he could begin worrying. And working out an escape.

Carter wandered down to the mahogany river across well-cropped grass and past large tinsel-type flowers. He knelt, dipped a finger in the thick liquid and tasted it. Chocolate. Of course.

Just on the off-chance, he pinched himself long and hard, squeezingly and painfully. It hurt enough. No, he'd known he hadn't been dreaming to begin with. For one thing, in a dream you rarely realize you're dreaming.

This was real.

Chocolate syrup to drink. And for food —

The two little hills were covered with dwarf trees bearing lollipops, the cellophane-wrapped fruit varying slightly in color from tree to tree. Here and there on the level ground were bonbon bushes and sharply triangular Christmas-tree affairs from whose twigs dangled small pies, cakes and assorted cookies — most of them chocolate.

The sun beat down rosily, rosily, and none of the chocolate melted. The chocolate river, on the other hand, ran interminably and gurglingly. Whatever its sources, wherever it rose, the river evidently had plenty of reserves.

Carter was struck by an especially ugly thought. Suppose, viewing the river's affluence, suppose it *rained* chocolate! Really, one could not put anything past the Malted Milk Monster.

LEE had objected to the name. "She's just a fat little girl. Rather brilliant, rather neurotic, too. And very curious about the strange, distinguished young man who's buying her teacher a soda."

"All right, but I've been counting," Carter had insisted. "Five chocolate malteds since we came in. *Five!* And the way she sits there at the end of the counter, never taking her eyes off us, not even when she unwraps a fresh straw!"

"Most of the children in Greenville have more spending money than is good for them. Dorothy's parents are divorced — mother's a big-time buyer, father's a vice-president of a bank — and they use their money to fight for her affections. She spends practically all of her time in Goldie's. You know, Carter, that psychological equation: when I was small and my parents loved me, they gave me food; therefore, food equals love?"

Carter nodded. He knew all about such psychological equations. As a determined and well-sexed young bachelor, he had studied Freud as intently as a second lieutenant in the First World War might have studied von Clausewitz.

"You're so damned feminine," he announced warmly, underlining the points that, with any luck at all, would shortly be at issue. "Only a gal who was woman all the way through would be able to see in that ball of lard, that pimply Malted Milk Monster—"

"She's no such thing, Carter! What a terrible nickname for such a mixed-up little girl! Although," Lee mused, swirling the long spoon about in the residual muddy bubbles of her soda glass, "although it is funny you should think of it. That's what — or something like it — the other kids in the class call her. They tell stories about her — that she can make stones and flowerpots disappear just by staring

hard at them. Kids are just like adults, a little more obvious, that's all. They make a witch out of the unpopular one."

He kept trying. "They never made one out of you, that's for sure. Anybody who's the slightest bit sensitive just has to look at you to know that love and loving—"

"It's so pathetic, really," she interrupted without knowing it. "I asked them to write a composition about the happiest day they could remember. Do you know what Dorothy wrote about? A day in her dream world, a day that never ever happened. And yet it was beautifully done, for a child her age. Full of affection-symbols like cake and candy. The world was supposed to smell like an ice cream parlor. Imagine! There was a finely written passage — you appreciate good writing, Carter, I know — about two cute little hills all covered with lollipop trees, each tree bearing a different flavor. And between the hills there wound a stream of purest chocolate!"

CARTER gave up. He lit a cigarette and stared over Lee's earnest but nonetheless lovely head. At the grossly heavy little girl whose fat overflowed the last stool in the ice cream parlor, her mouth sucking steadily at the chocolate malted milk, her eyes as steadily sucking at his. He found himself forced to drop his glance first.

"—even when we have a drawing lesson," Lee was still on it. "She never does anything else. It's absolutely real to the poor child — so lonely, so starved for companionship! I've learned to expect that flat blue sky full of oval pink clouds, those curved-line birds, that chocolate river and all those bushes filled with goodies. Every single time! For a child of her intelligence, she's somewhat retarded graphically. She draws like a child a year or two younger. But that's to be expected: it's almost purely a verbal, a conceptual intelligence, you might say—"

You might also say the topic had created a highly annoying and useless diversion. Carter bit on the cigarette through his lips, looked up again cautiously. The Malted Milk Monster's eyes were as unwavering as ever. Such *pulling* power — what was so fascinating about him? Well, her father was a Madison Avenue type: the clothes, probably. Carter was justly proud of his wardrobe. His clothes, he knew, were in almost ostentatious good taste—they screamed restraint and expensive lowness of key.

Yes, that was it. He reminded her of her father. Her rich father.

Carter caught himself preening and stubbed out the cigarette in abrupt harsh disgust. Damn it! That was the trouble with this Madison Avenue music — you laughed at it, you kidded others

about it, you even read books satirizing it — and then you found yourself singing to it. He reminded her of her father who was the vice-president of a bank and probably quite well off. Well, so what? Did that say anything good about Carter Broun? Not necessarily at all, at all. Carter Broun was just a well-educated, clever and rather lucky young man who had found his way into a well-paying, clever and extremely luck-flavored business.

A young man who had gotten so deeply involved in the superficialities of the business that when a child as obviously and horrifyingly tormented as this little girl came to his attention, all he could see was a neat gag nickname — this kind of shallow, brilliant thing you'd toss off to a client at a sales conference.

Lee, now. Lee's roots were still wrapped around the compact, squirming mass of the human race. She loved her work but she *cared* too; she certainly cared. The way she goes on! The way her eyes shine as she talks!

“—the other children were positively stupefied. Or that time I asked them to make up riddles. Do you know what Dorothy asked when her turn came? Just listen to this, Carter. She asked the class: ‘Which would you rather—be eaten by a giant caterpillar, or a million tiny little lions?’ Now I maintain that a girl with that much imagination—”

“That much maladjustment,” he corrected. “She sounds like a very sick kid. But I’d give a lot,” he mused, “to see how she’d do on a Rorschach. A giant caterpillar, or a million tiny little lions . . . and without even ink-blots to go on! Do you know if she’s ever had any psychotherapy?”

HIS companion had smiled grimly. “Her parents are very well off, I told you. I suspect she’s had *all* the advantages. Up to and including protracted legal battles as to whether she’s to go to poppa’s doctor or momma’s doctor. What that girl really needs, no one can give her: a different set of parents, or, at the least, one parent who really cares for her.”

Carter had disagreed. “Not so much now, not at her age. I’d say it would be much more helpful at this point to have a couple of kids who like and accept her. If there’s one thing that motivational research brings home to you, it’s what thoroughgoing social animals we humans are. Without a matrix of companionship, without the interest and approval of at least a handful of our contemporaries, we’re worse than mixed up — we aren’t even people. Hermits aren’t people; I don’t know what they are, exactly, but they’re not people. And so long as that kid is a psychological hermit, she’s not really a human person. She’s something else.”

Somewhere in the next fifteen minutes, he knew that he had clicked with Lee. But by then he was deep in the problem of how one could help a kid like Dorothy to make friends. It had become an MR problem, dealing with the individual, however, rather than the group; and, like all MR problems, of such obsessing interest to him that nothing else mattered.

In the end, it had been Lee who had changed the subject very forcefully; it had been Lee who had to drop hints about their next date. He'd managed to get a grip on himself and began talking about what they'd do when she came into town to meet him next Friday night. All in all, it had worked out quite well.

But as they left the soda shop, Carter had thrown just one last glance behind him through the plate-glass window. The Malted Milk Monster had turned on her stool, straw still in her mouth, eyes following him like a pair of starving sharks.

And then, of course, shadowing them all the way to Lee's home. What had she done to him? How had she done it? *Why?*

HE kicked angrily at a loose stone, watched it bounce into the river with a thick brown splash. Was this one of the stones Dorothy had abstracted from the real world? Again, how? Not why, though; it could well have been part of a

series of controlled experiments to test the range of her powers.

Powers? Was that the word? Talent, perhaps, or catalytic capacity — that might be more descriptive.

Given a very remarkable mind, given a very strong personality imbedded in a child's brain, given unhappiness, unpopularity, and general neurosis to sharpen that mind, to add even more punch to the personality — and what? *What* would develop?

He suddenly recalled his last thoughts before arriving in this lollipop world. Just after he'd left Lee, his head full of happy thoughts about Friday night, just at the very moment he'd seen the kid staring at him, he'd begun thinking about her problems again. The realization that she had followed them all the way from the soda shop out of sheer murderous loneliness had stimulated him into wondering about her mind.

There had been a sequence. First: *Gee, she's hungry for people.* Then: *Not for people in general, for kids her own age. How would you go about making kids like her?* Now there's a motivation problem for you! Then: *Well, the first question is what are her motives; what's it like in her mind?* Good professional MR unraveling technique.

And then that terrible flash, that mental rip, and he'd opened his eyes here.

IN other words, he'd had something to do with it. It hadn't been all her. He'd been wide open psychologically, trying to visualize the inside of her mind, just as she had — as she had done something.

No, it still required something from her, for all this to have happened. And no matter what you called it — talent, powers, catalysis — she had it. And she'd used it on him.

Carter shivered suddenly, remembering the riddle she'd made up.

He was adrift in the fantasy life of that kind of kid. He wished he had paid attention to Lee's earlier discussion in the ice cream parlor instead of forcing the conversation back into more lucrative channels. To get out safely, to survive, he could use every scrap of information on Dorothy that had ever existed.

After all, her most meager wishes were now the fixed and immutable natural laws under which he had to operate.

He was no longer alone, he observed. He was surrounded by children. They had seemingly materialized all around him, yelling, playing, scrambling, jumping. And where the yelling was loudest, where the games were thickest, there was Dorothy. The Malted Milk Monster. The children gambled about her like so many fountains against a central statue.

She stood there, still staring at him. And her stare was as uncomfortable as ever. A little more so, for that matter, than he remembered it. She wore the same blue jeans and yellow cashmere sweater with smudges on it. She was taller than life-size, a bit taller than the other children. She was slenderer, too. Now, in all fairness, you could not call her more than plump.

And she had no pimples.

Carter was irritated at how fast he'd had to drop his eyes. But to keep them open and aimed at her was like looking directly into the beam of an anti-aircraft searchlight.

"Looka me, Dorothy!" the kids yelled. "I'm jumping! Looka how high I can jump!"

"How about playing tag, Dorothy?" they yelled. "Let's play tag! You choose who should be It!"

"Make up a new game, Dorothy! Make up one of the good games you always make up!"

"Let's have a picnic, huh, Dorothy?"

"Dorothy, let's have a relay race!"

"Dorothy, let's play house!"

"Dorothy, let's jump rope!"

"Dorothy—"

"Dorothy—"

"Dorothy—"

WHEN she started to speak, every one of the kids shut up. They stopped running, they stopped yelling, they stopped what-

ever they were doing and turned to look at her.

"This nice man," she said. "He'll play with us. Won't you, mister?"

"No," Carter said. "I'd like to, but I'm afraid I—"

"He'll play a game of ball with us," she went on imperturbably. "Here, mister. Here's the ball. You're a nice man to play with us."

When she moved toward him, holding out a large striped ball which had suddenly appeared in her hands, the bulk of the children moved with her.

Carter was still searching for words wherewith to explain that while he had no interest at the moment in playing a game of ball, he was much interested in a private conversation with Dorothy herself, an audience, so to speak — when the ball was thrust into his fingers and he found himself playing.

"You see, I don't usually—" he began as he threw the ball and caught it, threw the ball and caught it.

"Very busy right now, but some other ti—" he continued as he caught the ball and threw it, caught the ball and threw it.

No matter in which direction he threw the ball, no matter how many eager pairs of child hands made a grab for it, it was always Dorothy who received it and threw it back to him.

"Yay, Dorothy!" the children yelled. "This is fun!"

"Be glad to play with you kids as soon as I finish my—" Carter puffed, finding it fantastically tough exercise.

"Yay, Dorothy! This is a real good game!"

"Such a nice man!"

"So much fun!"

Dorothy threw the ball straight up in the air and it disappeared. "Let's play leap-frog," she said. "Would you like to play leap-frog with us, mister?"

"Sorry," Carter gasped as he bent, his hands on his knees, so that she could leap over his back from behind. "I haven't played leap-frog in years and I don't intend to st—" He ran forward, placed his hands in the small of Dorothy's back, sailed across, bent forward again in expectation of her jump. "Leap-frog is one game that I never—"

They played leap-frog until he was wobbling with dizziness, until every breath felt as if it had been clawed out of his chest.

Dorothy seated herself gracefully on the ground and gathered the children in an adoring cluster. "Now we'd like to hear a story. Please, mister, tell us a story?"

Carter started an agonized protest. It was somehow transformed into the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, told wheezingly and punctuated with heaving gulps for air. Then he told the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Then he told the story of Bluebeard.



Somewhere near the end of that particular work, Dorothy disappeared. But the children remained, and Carter continued the story, willy-nilly. The kids began to look frightened. Some shivered, others moaned and cried.

IT had been getting darker for the past few minutes, and just as Carter finished the last lines of Bluebeard and, without stopping, launched into "Once upon a time there was a poor but honest woodcutter who had two children named Hansel and Gretel," a huge black cloud slid across the sky and swooped down at them.

A terrifying scarlet face with an enormous nose and flashing white teeth came out of the cloud and roared till the ground shook. Then it stopped and began to gnash its teeth. This sounded like an explosion in a crockery warehouse.

The children screamed in pure eye-popping terror and ran. "Dorothy!" they shrieked. "Dorothy, save us! The Bad Old Man! Save us, Dorothy, save us! Dorothy, where are you?"

Carter sank to the grass, released and utterly exhausted. He was far too tired to run or even look up, far too upset to care what happened to him any more. It seemed like the first time in hours that his body was his again to command; but his body wasn't worth very much at the moment.

"Hey, Mac," a voice queried sympathetically over his head. "They givin' you a hard time?"

It was the scarlet face from the cloud. It no longer looked terrifying, merely concerned in a friendly fashion. And it was shrinking rapidly in size until it was in correct proportion to the normal human body under it. When it was a rather ordinary red and grizzled face, dirty with a few days' growth of beard around the red and busily veined nose, its owner knelt on the edge of the cloud and leaped to the ground, a distance, by this time, of half a dozen feet.

He was an oldish man of middle height, wearing a pair of solid gray pants, a torn brown shirt which hung outside it down to his hips and, on his bare feet, two frayed and filthy canvas shoes, one of which was split at the sole. He looked familiar, as every bum somehow looks like every other bum. He was the very essence of shambling, sodden derelict, a pure example of absolute human junk, but—

He was an adult.

Carter sprang up and offered his hand joyfully. It was shaken in a flabby, uncertain, half-cringing way, like a newly paroled prisoner taking his farewell of the warden.

"Could you use a drink, Mac?"

"I sure as hell could," Carter told him heartily. "Am I glad to see you!"

The derelict nodded vaguely, reached up and pulled the black cloud even closer. He fumbled inside and pulled a bottle out. It was about half full, but though the fluid it contained was the proper shade of amber, it was clear glass all the way around. No label.

He held out this beggar's choice. "Name's Eddie. What they call me Shirttail. You need a glass to drink from? Ain't no glasses."

Carter shrugged. He sterilized the open top of the bottle with the palm of his hand, put it to his mouth and took a broad gulp.

"Whouch!" he said.

HE found himself coughing so hard that he almost dropped the bottle. Shirttail took it away from him solicitously. "Awful, ain't it?" he asked, then proceeded to belt down a third of the stuff.

Awful, Carter decided, was not quite the word for it. It tasted like whiskey, all right, somewhere way down at the bottom, but with an overlay consisting of iodine, ammonia, camphor and dilute hydrochloric acid. His tongue squirmed in his mouth like a trapped snake.

Shirttail removed the bottle from his mouth, shuddered, grimaced, and licked his lips. "That's what *she* thinks whiskey tastes like."

"Who? Dorothy?"

"Atsit. The kid — whatever she thinks something tastes like, that's

what it tastes like. But it's better'n nothing, better'n no booze at all. Wanna come up to the place? We can sit a while."

He was pointing to the cloud which hung low over them, a dark and misshapen dirigible. Doubtfully, Carter grabbed some of its tenuous material and pulled himself up. It was like swimming through fog that felt solid only at the places your hands touched it.

A soaring black cavern of a room. Off in a corner — a niche, rather, since there were no corners — stood an army cot covered with ragged plaid blankets, a table-full of cracked cups and saucers, and three sagging, garbagey-looking easy chairs. An unshaded light bulb hung from a thin wire over the cot and burned tinily, resentfully, in the piles of gloom. Whether or not the area behind the cot could properly be called a wall, it was covered from top to bottom with glossy pictures of naked women.

"Not my idea — hers," Shirttail explained as he clambered up through the floor. "Everything's hers, every idea, everything. What she once saw the inside of a night-watchman's shack, I figure. What to her I'm the same kinda guy as the night-watchman, so that's the layout I get. But thank God for the bottle. The pictures, far as I'm concerned, you can have, but the bottle — thank God for the bottle."

He offered it to Carter, who

shook his head and hand in a no. They sat in two facing easy chairs, each of which immediately settled off to one side in opposite directions. Damn it, Carter thought, I *have* seen him before. But where?

"Take a slug, Mac, go ahead, take a slug. One good thing she's got here, that kid — the bottle gets full as fast as you kill it. You ain't takin' nothin' from me when you help yourself. And if you don't drink regular, you'll be talkin' to yourself. What you won't talk sense."

Carter considered the point and saw it might well be valid. He took another drink. It was fully as bad as the first, but the effects of the alcohol came through more strongly now and tended to insulate against the flavor. He sighed and swallowed some more. No doubt about it, the world — even Dorothy's world — looked better.

He handed the bottle back and studied his companion. Hardly the right type for this place, when you came right down to it. A bum. A very average old bum. Why him as The Bad Old Man?

"How long have you been here?" Carter asked him.

SHIRTTAIL shrugged and stared loose-lipped over the top of the bottle. "A year, maybe. Two years, maybe. What there's no way to figure. Sometimes winter one day, sometimes summer tomorrow.

What even my beard don't grow no more after I came. I feel like years and years *and* years and years. Worsen stir, worsen anything. The things I been through here, Mac, the things I been through!"

"Bad?" Carter asked sympathetically.

"*Bad?*" Shirrtail indicated just how bad by rolling his red eyes in an emphatic upward arc. "Bad don't come near. I got to go out and scare those kids whenever she wants me to. What I'm in the sack, what I got other things on my mind, don't make no difference. Dorothy gives out with a think: 'Come a-runnin' and start a-scarin'.' I got to drop whatever I'm doin'. I'm in the sack, what the hell, I got other things on my mind, I got to drop it and start a-scarin'. I blow up big like you just saw me, I got to scream and bang my choppers, I got to zoom on down. Then the kids yell: 'Dorothy, save us!' and she starts takin' me apart. What I mean apart. The things she's done to me, *biff! bam! pow! pam!*, slapped me silly, up, down, around, every which way, for a-scarin' those kids! What it wasn't my idea in the first place. I just do it 'cause she gives out with a think and makes me do it."

"Ever try resisting, refusing?" Carter inquired. "I mean what happens if you say no?"

"Mac, you don't say no. You just don't. Everything here goes her

way. When she itches, you scratch. When she sneezes, you wipe your nose. What I used to call her all kindsa names to myself, just to pass the time — Mac, I don't remember a single one now. I try to remember one dirty name and I can't, to save my skin. She's just Dorothy. That's all I can call her. You know what I mean? Everything goes her way, even inside your head. The only leeway you get is to stay the kinda guy she sees you as in the first place. But otherwise it's her way, and the longer you stick around, the more her way it is."

Carter remembered with dismay how little he had wanted to play ball or leap-frog and how thoroughly he had played. Worse, how he had told stories when he had intended to protest. And worse yet, he hadn't — even in his own mind — used the phrase The Malted Milk Monster for some time now! He had thought of her, had referred to her, only as Dorothy.

"And the longer you stick around—"

He had to get out of here, had to find some way to smash out of this world — fast.

Shirttail was offering the bottle again. Carter refused it impatiently. Escape, breaking out, that came first. And for that he'd need his mind at its clearest. The alternative was being slowly absorbed, psychologically as well as physically, into Dorothy's dream world, un-

til even his thoughts would be only slightly eccentric versions of her image of him, and he would be caught, like a fly immortalized by amber, in whatever habitation and whatever role she visualized for The Nice Man.

THE Nice Man! He shivered. What a way to spend the rest of his life! No, now, while he was still more or less himself, Carter Broun, while his brain still glittered with the edge of a bright young motivational research executive in the real world, *now* was the time to break through.

The real world. As good a name for it as any other. Carter was a mystic never and a Freudian only when the occasion suited him. His credo was simple: anything that *is* is real. So . . .

Postulate a cosmos sufficiently long in extension and sufficiently broad in possibility, and there has to be room somewhere in all its infinities for every kind of world that Man could imagine.

Or a child dream up.

And suppose a child, out of overpowering longing and loneliness, out of some incredible innate talent, perhaps, is able to break through the folds of cosmic enormities into the one cranny where its dream world exists as a tangible, everyday truth. Not much of a step from there to switching other individuals, adults even, stones and flowerpots

certainly, from one universe to the other. The original supposition, Carter decided, was the difficult one. Once that was accepted, the others were easy.

In an unlimited number of parallel worlds, to find the true home of one's mind . . .

Was that what Dorothy had done? And, in that case, which would be the dream world, which the real? You could probably die in either with equal ease — so *that* was no criterion.

Well, what difference did it make? The real world, for Carter, was the world from which he had been pulled, the world in which he had standing, individuality and personal purpose. The world he liked and intended to return to. And this, this other world, no matter how substantial unto itself in its peculiar space-time matrix, was the dream world — the world he must flee. The world that he had to prove, against the logic of his very senses, did not exist — by leaving it, or by destroying it somehow.

Destroying . . .

He stared hard at Shirttail. No wonder the derelict had looked so familiar!

It had been the briefest glimpse, weeks ago, possibly months, but the word brought back the sententious caption under that unforgettable photograph.

A tabloid newspaper on a print-wet, newly arrived pile he'd noticed

over his shoulder as he'd been passing the newsstand at 53rd Street, just off Madison. And he'd had to stop and take another look at the photograph spreading its shock value over a sector of the front page. **A MAN WHO DESTROYED HIMSELF** was the caption's headline.

The caption went on to explain, in the most appalled journalese, that this was what you might expect to look like if you spent the rest of your life not working, sleeping in doorways, and drinking, instead of eating, your meals. "Even hardened interns and nurses at the hospital averted their faces from this terrible thing that had once been a man (story on Page 23)."

BUT the photograph *did* show a terrible thing that had once been a man. He was shown in the alley as he'd been found, shown just as the stretcher was being lifted, and you weren't likely to forget him for a long, long time.

The worst part of it was that he was alive. The eyes stared into the lens of the camera without any pretense of seeing. There was no mark on the face or body, no blood, nothing but dirt, and yet you had the feeling that this was a man who had fallen out of a window ten stories up or been hit by a car speeding at ninety miles an hour — and not been killed. Not completely killed, anyway, just partially killed.

The body lay and the eyes stared and the man was alive, but nothing more than that could be said. Looking at the picture, you suddenly thought of complex organic compounds that were almost living creatures but had not yet made the grade. The flabby, sheer non-consciousness of this yet-sentient creature made catatonia seem in comparison a rather jolly, extremely active state.

According to the caption, he had been found looking like this in an alley; he had been removed to a large city hospital, and, after ten hours, the doctors had not been able to do a single thing with him. No response at all.

Carter remembered the picture well. It had been a picture of Shirt-tail.

Somewhere, at this very moment, possibly in a hospital in Grenville Acres, before the eyes of a terrified, a nauseated Lee, there was another body that bore a physical resemblance to one Carter Broun, but that in every important respect looked exactly like that horrible photograph. A body that was barely alive, that would not respond to any stimuli, that could do no more than exist — since its consciousness was elsewhere.

Here, in Dorothy's private chocolate-candy world.

He had to get out of this place. No matter what, he was *going* to get out of this place.

Only he'd need something close to dynamite. Psychological dynamite.

"—even cut my throat," Shirt-tail was going on heavily. "Oh, I maybe coulda cut my throat at the beginning, if I'da thoughta' it. Too late now: I'm stopped cold any time I try. What I tried starving myself, but no go. Only candy to eat ina first place. Anybody can kick candy — it don't do no good, though. You don't hafta eat here, don't even hafta breathe. You stop breathin', you don't croak. Fact, Mac, fact. I done it. Hours and hours you can hold your breath: nothin' happens. Nothin' happens but what she wants to happen. And that's all. That's it."

CARTER suggested, desperately trying to drag an elementary idea out of the concept of parallel universes, "How about the two of us getting together here and talking things over, just as we're doing? If we mapped out some workable sort of plan right now, it would be something she wouldn't like to have happen — but if we did, it would be real — it would have happened."

"Mac, you still don't get it. If you and me are together talkin', then someway or other that's the way *she* wants it. What she figures we go together, like, and we oughta be talkin' or bein' together. Meanwhile, she's workin' it out. What she's gonna do next. What we ain't

gonna like it one damn bit, but so what? — far's she's concerned."

Carter frowned, not at Shirttail's last remarks, but at an unexpected and highly uncomfortable corroboration. He had suddenly felt an enormous tugging sensation in both his mind and body. Something was pulling at him to leave the cloud and descend to the candied surface.

Dorothy was coming back. She wanted him on the spot once more. She had a new sequence. Carter fought the tug grimly. He began to perspire.

The tug grew stronger. And stronger.

He squeezed his hands into tight, painful fists. "The Malted Milk Monster," he forced himself to say between clenched teeth. "Remember — *The Malted Milk Monster*."

Shirttail looked up, intrigued. "Hey," he said. "Do me a favor, Mac — cuss her out. It'll do me good, honest, to hear a coupla good, first-class cuss words. Even if I won't remember them worth a damn, I'd still like to hear them again, just for old time's sake. Hey, Mac?"

Carter, threshing about in the chair, elbows digging into his sides, immersed in his own private struggle, shook his head. "No," he gasped. "Can't. Not now."

"I know. It's tough. What I mean, tough. Like when I first come, I used to battle it out the same way,

every time I feel her give out with a think. I battle and I battle, and it's no go. I been moochin' all day, see, up and down the East Fifties, Sutton Place, all like that. I been moochin' for the price of a flop, for the price of a shot, but not a chance. What it's so cold, my back's draggin' the sidewalk, but the whole goddam world's got its pocket buttoned. Comes night, no flop. The whole night, I carry the banner. I stay awake, I keep walkin', what I don't wanna freeze. Five, six o'clock in the mornin', there's this can, there's half a fifth right on top in a bagfulla garbage. I hit it, oh, I hit it good."

Against his most determined mental opposition, Carter found himself getting to his feet. He knew his face was turning purple with the effort. He had to stop her now. He had to. It was the only way to invalidate her world.

But the Malt — Dorothy was calling him.

SHIRTTAIL rubbed a trembling filthy forefinger up and down the neck of the bottle. "And then I see this little alleyway between the buildings, what there's supposed to be a gate locking it off but it's been left open. I go in, it's dark, but there's a grating, hot air coming up from a basement, and I'm outa the wind. Sack time. What I think I'm one lucky old bum, but it's the last time I think about luck.

I wake up, it's light, there's this kid, this Dorothy lookin' at me. Lookin', lookin'. She's got a big ball in her hands and she's standin' there lookin' at me. She points to the bottle.

"That's my daddy's bottle," she says. "He threw it out last night, after the party. But it's his bottle." I don't want no trouble with kids in this neighborhood, and I don't like the way it feels the way she looks. 'Scat, kid,' I say, and I sack out again. What I wake up next, here I am. I got the bottle and that's all I got. Mac, from that time on, it's rough. What I mean, *rough*. She had things here then, big things, things with legs and all kindsa—"

As if he were willing and even desirous of doing it, Carter turned his back on The Bad Old Man and began walking down through black fog. Behind him, the words continued to splash out like liquid from a steadily shaken glass. Carter's legs walked in direct contradiction to the nerve impulses they were receiving.

He couldn't refuse, couldn't resist. That much was obvious. As well try to refuse, to resist, the Flood of forty days and forty nights, or the sun that Joshua made to stand still. Another way. He must find another way to fight. Meanwhile, he had to come as she demanded.

Dorothy was waiting for him on a patch of well-mown grass near a

pink and green bonbon bush. As he came down beside her, she glanced away from him for a moment and at the dark cloud.

It disappeared.

What happened to Shirttail, Carter wondered — had he been wiped out for good? Or temporarily relegated to some sort of Limbo of reverie?

And then he really saw Dorothy — and the changes she had made.

She was still wearing the blue jeans, but the cashmere sweater was clean, perfectly clean. A bright, brand-new yellow. And she was taller. And she was even more slender than she had been before.

But that yellow cashmere sweater!

It was filled with two impossibly protruding breasts that belonged on a poster in front of a cheap movie house announcing the triumphant attributes of a Hollywood love goddess.

The rest of her body was still childlike, seemingly even more so than when he had first seen her, but this was due to the caricature effect of that incredible bosom.

Except —

Yes, except for the smear of red across each lip, the lumps of mascara at the tips of the eyelashes, and the clashing, smashing colors on her fingernails. Did this mean —

He shook his head uncertainly, irritably. He hadn't counted on anything like this. Whatever it was,





"So," Dorothy simpered at last. "We meet again."

"It was meant to be," Carter found himself breathing. "We two have a common destiny. We live under the same strange star."

TALK about your precocious kids! But where did she get the dialogue, he wondered frantically — movies? Television drama? Books? Or out of her own complex-crammed head? And what did he represent in it? *Her* rôle was obvious: she was blatantly competing with Lee.

There was a struggling wisp of uncombed thought: Lee and who else? But over and around it was the horrified knowledge that he was saying things he would never say of his own volition. How soon before he'd be *thinking* such clichés?

And there was a memory at the back of his mind — he had a name for her that was very much his own creation, very hard to remember, but he had to remember it, something like, rather like, let's see now — *Dorothy*. The only name for her there was.

But that hadn't been it. No.

He thought in pitiful, despairing wing-flaps, like an ostrich trying to fly. *Awful, awful*. He had to touch his own real personality somehow. He had to break through.

Shatter—

"Is your love then so strong, so truly true?" she demanded. "You

have not forgotten me after all this time? Look into my eyes and tell me so. Tell me that your heart still belongs to me alone."

No, *I won't*, he groaned. He looked into her eyes. *I can't! Not such absolute baloney. And she's a kid — a little girl!*

"Do you doubt me, my darling?" he said softly, the sentences coming out of him in so many punched-out breaths. "Don't ever, ever doubt me. You are the only one for me, forever and always, as long as there is a sky overhead and an earth beneath. You and I, forever and always."

He had to stop. She was getting complete control over him. He said whatever she wanted him to say. And he was going to think it, too. But he couldn't prevent the words from flowing out of his mouth, once it was his turn, once she had finished and was waiting—

Dorothy looked off into the distance toward the two hills of equal height. Her eyes were misty, and, in spite of himself, Carter felt a catch in his throat. *Ridiculous! And yet how sad . . .*

"I almost feared your love," she mused. "I grew lonely and came to believe—"

Now. While she was doing the talking. While the full force of her mind was not turned compellingly upon him. Make it real. That's the way to bust this dream world. Make it real.

He reached for her.

"—that you had forgotten and found another. How was I to know—"

He grabbed at her.

He made it real.

There was an instant when the ground shook under his feet, when there was a ripping sound from one end to another of the solid blue sky. There was just one instant when he exulted.

Then Dorothy turned wide, terror-stricken eyes at him. And screamed!

HER scream was the loudest thing in the universe. It went on and on and on, deafeningly. Yet he wasn't deafened, because he heard it all, every bit of it from the beginning, in each and every note of its immense range, all of its skull-powdering volume, all of its volcanic fear.

Not only Dorothy screamed. The candy trees screamed. The cookie bushes screamed. The two hills screamed. The chocolate river stood up between its screaming banks and screamed. The stones, the very air screamed.

And the ground fell apart and Carter Broun dropped into it. He dropped for centuries, he dropped for eons, he dropped for galactic eternities. Then he stopped dropping, stopped screaming himself, took his hands from his ears and looked around.

He was inside a dull gray, perfectly spherical, perfectly featureless vault. There were no doors and no windows, no seams and no cracks anywhere in the curving surface all about him. It was absolutely impenetrable and absolutely soundproof.

It had to be, he began to realize, as he scuttled dizzily around and around inside it. It had to be im-

penetrable and soundproof. It had to be at the bottommost bottom of the dream world, so that no sight and no sound from it should ever reach Dorothy's consciousness.

It was a total repression, this chamber of her mind, built to hide the deadly dangerous memory that was himself — built to last as long as Dorothy lasted.

— WILLIAM TENN

GUARD YOUR FAMILY

**FIGHT CANCER WITH A
CHECKUP AND A CHECK**
AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

The Waging of



The Peace



By FREDERIK POHL

Shotgun logic

*to win an impossible war
needs only logic and a shotgun
... but an impossible peace
can't be won the same way ...
or can it?*

Illustrated by WOOD

I

AFTER old man Tighe conquered the country (oh, now, listen. I already told you about that. Don't pester me for the same story over and over again. You remember about the Great March, from Pung's Corners to the Pentagon, and how Honest Jack Tighe, the Father of the Second Republic, overcame the massed might of the greatest nation of the world with a shotgun and a .22 rifle. Of course you do.)

Anyway. After old man Tighe conquered the country, things went pretty well for a while.

Oh, it was a pleasant time and a great one! He changed the world,

Jack Tighe did. He took a pot of strong black coffee into his room—it was the Lincoln Study, as it was called at the time; now, of course, we know it as Tighe's Bedchamber—and sat up all one night, writing, and when the servants came wondering to him the next morning, there it was: the Bill of Wrongs.

See if you can remember them. Everybody learns them by heart. Surely you did too:

1. The first wrong that we must abolish is the forced sale of goods. In future, no one shall sell goods. Vendors may only permit their customers to buy.

2. The second wrong that we must abolish is Advertising. All billboards are to be ripped down at once. Magazines and newspapers will confine their paid notices to one quarter-inch per page, and these may not have illustrations.

3. The third wrong that we must abolish is the Commercial. Anybody who tries to use God's free air time for pushing commodities offered for sale is an enemy of all the people, and has to be exiled to Antarctica. At least.

Why, it was the very prescription for a Golden Age! That's the way it was, and the way the people rejoiced was amazing.

Except—well, there was the matter of the factories in the caverns.

FOR instance, there was a man named Cossett. His first name was Archibald, but you don't have to bother remembering that part; his wife had a strong stomach, but *that* was more than she could put up with, and she mostly called him Bill. They had three kids—boys—named Chuck, Dan and Tommy, and Mrs. Cossett considered herself well off.

One morning she told her husband so: "Bill, I love the way Honest Jack Tighe has fixed everything up for us! Remember how it was, Bill? Remember? And now, why—well, look. Don't you notice anything?"

"Hm?" inquired Cossett.

"Your breakfast," said Essie Cossett. "Don't you like it?"

Bill Cossett looked palely at his breakfast. Orange juice, toast, coffee. He sighed deeply.

"Bill! I asked you if you *liked* it!"

"I'm eating it, aren't I? When did I ever have anything different?"

"Never, honey," his wife said gently. "You always have the same thing. But don't you notice that the toast isn't burned?"

Cossett chewed a piece of it without emotion. "That's nice," he said.

"And the coffee is fit to drink. And so's the orange juice."

Cossett said irritably: "Essie, it's *great* orange juice. It will be remembered."

Mrs. Cossett flared: "Bill, I can't say a *thing* to you in the morning

without your flying *completely* off the—"

"Essie," shouted her husband, "I had a bad night!" He glared at her, a good-looking man, still young, fine father and good provider, but at the end of his rope. "I didn't sleep! Not a wink! I was awake all night, tossing and turning, tossing and turning, worrying, worrying, worrying. I'm *sorry!*" he cried, daring her to accept the apology.

"But I only—"

"Essie!"

Mrs. Cossett was wounded to the quick. Her lip quivered. Her eyes moistened. Her husband, seeing the signs, accepted defeat.

He sank back against his chair as she said meekly: "I only wanted to point out that it isn't ruined. But you're so touchy, Bill, that — I mean," she said hurriedly, "do you remember what it was like in the old days, before Jack Tighe freed us all? When every month there was a new pop-up toaster, and sometimes you had to dial each slice separately for Perfect Custom Yumminess, and sometimes a red Magic Ruby Reddy-Eye did it for you? When the coffee maker you bought in June used coarse percolator coffee grind and the one you got to replace it in September took drip?

"And now," she cried radiantly, her momentary anger forgotten, "and now I've had the same appliances for *more than six months!*

I've had time to learn to use them! I can keep them until they wear out! And when they're gone, if I want I can get the exact same model again! Oh, Bill," she wept, quite overcome, "how *did* we get along in the old days, before Jack Tighe?"

Her husband pushed his chair back from the table and sat regarding her without a word for a long moment.

Then he got up, reached for his hat, groaning, "Ah, who can eat?" and rushed out of the house to his place of business.

The sign over his store read:

A. COSSETT & CO.
Authorized Buick Dealer

He sobbed all the way down to the shop.

YOU musn't feel too sorry for old Bill Cossett; there were a lot like him those days. But it was pretty sad, no doubt of it.

When he got to the shop, he wanted to sob some more, but how could he, in front of the staff? One little break from him and all of them would have been wailing.

As it was, his head salesman, Harry Bull, was in a dither. He was lighting one cigarette after another, taking a single abstracted puff and placing each of them neatly, side by side like spokes, along the rim of his big glass ashtray. He didn't

know he was doing it, of course. His eyes were fixed emptily on the ash-tray, all right, but what his glazed vision beheld were the smoldering ashes of hellfire.

He looked up when his boss came in.

"Chief," he burst out tragically, "they've come in! The new models! I had the Springfield office on the phone a *dozen* times already this morning, I swear. But it's the same answer every time."

Cossett took a deep breath. This was a time for manhood. He stuck his chin out proudly and said, his voice perfectly level: "They won't cancel, then."

"They say they can't," said Harry Bull, and stared with a corpse's eyes at the crowded showroom. "They say the caverns are raising all the quotas. Sixteen more cars," he whispered dully, "and that's just the Roadmasters, Chief. I didn't tell you that part. Tomorrow we get the Specials and the Estate Wagons, and — and —"

"Mr. Cossett," he wept, "the Estate Wagons are *eleven inches longer this month!* I can't stand it!" he cried wildly. "We got eighteen hundred and forty-one cars piled up already! The floor's full. The shop's full. The top two floors are full. The lot's full. We hauled all the trade-ins off to the junkyard yesterday and, even so, now we got them double-parked on both sides of the street for six blocks in every

direction! You know, Chief, I couldn't even get to the place this morning? I had to park at the corner of Grand and Sterling and *walk* the rest of the way, because I couldn't get through!"

For the first time, Cossett's expression changed. "Grand and Sterling?" he repeated thoughtfully. "Yeah? I'll have to try coming that way tomorrow." Then he laughed, a bitter laugh. "One thing, Harry. Be glad we're handling Buicks and not, you know, one of the Low-Priced Three. I came by Culex Motors yesterday, and—

"By Godfrey," he shouted suddenly, "I'm going to go down and talk to Manny Culex. Why not? It isn't just our problem, Harry — it's everybody's. And maybe the whole industry ought to get together, just for once. We never did; nobody would start it. But things are getting to a point where somebody's got to lead the way. Well, it's going to be me! There just isn't any sense letting the caverns turn out all these new cars after Jack Tighe has told the whole blasted country that they don't have to buy them any more. Washington will do something. They'll have to!"

But all the way over to Manny Culex's, past the carton-barricaded appliance stores, widely skirting the shambles that surrounded the five and ten, rolling up the windows as he threaded his way past the burst spoiled food cans at the super-

market, Cossett couldn't put one question out of his mind:

Suppose they couldn't?

II

NOW you mustn't think Jack Tighe wasn't right on top of this situation. He knew about it. Oh, yes! Because it wasn't just Archibald Cossett and Manny Culex — it was every car dealer — and it wasn't just the car dealers, but every merchant in Rantoul who sold goods to the public; and it wasn't just Rantoul, but all of Illinois, all of the Middle West, all the country — and, yes, when you come right down to it, all of the world. (I mean all the *inhabited* world. Naturally there was no problem in, say, Lower Westchester.)

Things were piling up.

It was a matter of automation and salesmanship. In the big war, it had seemed like a good idea to automate the factories. Maybe it was—production was what counted then, all kinds of production. They certainly got the production, sure enough. Then, when the war was over, there was a method for handling the production — a method named advertising. But what did that mean, when you came to think it over? It meant that people had to be hounded into buying what they didn't really want, with money they hadn't yet earned. It meant pressure. It meant hypertension

and social embarrassment and competition and confusion.

Well, Jack Tighe took care of that part, him and his famous Bill of Wrongs.

Everybody agreed that things had been intolerable before — before, that is, Tighe and his heroic band had marched on the Pentagon and set us all free. The trouble was that now advertising had been abolished and nobody felt he had to buy the new models as they came out of the big automated plants in the underground caverns . . . and what were we going to do with the products?

Jack Tighe felt that problem as keenly as any vacuum-cleaner salesman hard-selling a suburban neighborhood from door to door. He knew what the people wanted. And if he hadn't, why, he would have found it pretty quickly, because the people, in their delegations and petitions, were taking every conceivable opportunity to let him know.

For instance, there was the Midwest Motor Car Association's delegation, led by Bill Cossett, his very own self. Cossett hadn't wanted to be chairman, but he'd been the one to suggest it, and that usually carries a fixed penalty: "You thought it up? Okay. You make it go."

Jack Tighe received them in person. He listened with great courtesy and concern to their prepared

speech; and that was unusual, because Tighe wasn't the relaxed old man who'd fished the Delaware south of Pung's Corners for so many happy years. No, he was an irritable President now, and delegations were nothing in his life; he faced fifty of them a day. And they all wanted the same thing. Just let us push our product a little, please? Naturally, no other commodity should be privileged to violate the Bill of Wrongs — nobody wants the Age of Advertising back!—but, Mr. President, the jewelry findings game (or shoes, or drugs, or business machines, or frozen food, and so forth) is historically, intrinsically, dynamically and pre-eminent-ly *different*, because . . .

And, you'd be surprised, they all thought up reasons to follow the "because." Some of the reasons were corkers.

BUT Jack Tighe didn't let them get quite as far as the reasons. He listened about a sentence and a half past the "nobody wants the Age of Advertising back" movement and into the broad largo that began the threnody of their unique troubles. And then he said, with a sudden impulse: "You there! The young fellow!"

"Cossett! Good old Bill Cossett!" cried a dozen eager voices, as they pushed him forward.

"I'm impressed," said Jack Tighe thoughtfully, seizing him by the

hand. He had had an idea, and maybe it was time to act on it. "I like your looks, Gossop," he said, "and I'm going to do something for you."

"You mean you're going to let us ad—" began the eager voices.

"Why, no," said Jack Tighe, surprised. "Of course not. But I'm setting up a Committee of Activity to deal with this situation, gentlemen. Yes, indeed. You mustn't think we've been idle here in Washington. And I'm going to put Artie Gossop — I mean Hassop — here on the Committee. There!" he said kindly, but proudly too. "And now," he added, leaving through his private door, "good day to you all."

It was a signal honor, Bill Cossett thought, or anyway all the eager voices assured him that it was.

But forty-eight hours later, he wasn't so sure.

The rest of the delegation had gone home. Why wouldn't they? They had accomplished what they set out to do. The problem was being taken care of.

But as for good old Bill Cossett, why, at that moment he was doing the actual taking care.

And he didn't like it. It turned out that this Committee of Activity was not merely to study and make recommendations. Oh, no. That wasn't Jack Tighe's way. The Committee was to *do* something. And for that reason, Cossett found him-

self with a rifle in his hand, in an armored half track. He was part of a task force of heavy assault troops, staring down the inclined ramp that led to the cavern factory under Farmingdale, Long Island.

LET me tell you about Farmingdale.

National Electro-Mech had its home office there — in the good old days, you know. Came the Cold War. The Board of Directors of National Electro-Mechanical Appliances, Inc., took a look at its balance sheet, smiled, thought of taxes, wept, and determined to plow a considerable part of its earnings into a new plant.

It was to be not merely a *new* plant, but a *fine* plant — wasn't the government paying for it anyhow, in a way? I mean what didn't come off taxes as capital expansion came back as pay for proximity-fuse contracts. So they dug themselves a great big hole — a regular underground Levittown of the machine, so to speak — acres and acres of floor surface, and all of it hidden from the light of day. Okay, chuckled the Board of Directors, rubbing its hands, let them shoot their ICBMs! Yah, yah! Can't touch *me*!

That was during the Cold War. Well, then the Cold War hotted up, you know. The missiles flew. The Board got its orders from Washington, hurry-up orders: automate, mechanize, make it faster,

boost its size. They took a deep breath and gamely sent the engineers back to the drawing boards.

The orders were to double production and make it independent of the outside world. The engineers whispered among themselves — “Are they *kidding*?” they asked — but they went to work, and as fast as the designs were approved, the construction machines went back to work to make them real.

The digging machines chugged down into the factory bays again, expanding them, making concealed tunnels; and this time they were followed by concrete-and-armor-plate layers, booby-trap setters, camouflieurs, counterattack planners.

They *hid* that plant, friend. They concealed it from infra-red, ultra-violet and visual-wave spotting, from radar and sonic echo beams, from everything but the nose of a seeing-eye dog, and maybe even from that.

They *armored* it.

They fixed it so you couldn't get near it, at least not alive. They *armed* it — with homing missiles, batteries of rapid-fire weapons, everything they could think of — and they had a lot of people thinking—that would discourage intruders.

They *automated* it; not only would it make its products, but it would keep on making them as long as the raw materials held out

— yes, and change the designs, too, because it is a basic part of industrial technology that planned obsolescence should be built into every unit.

Yes, that was the idea. Without a man anywhere in sight, the cavern factories could build their products, change their designs, retool and bring out new ones.

More than that. They set sales quotas, by direct electronic hook-up with the master computer of the Bureau of the Census in Washington; they wrote on electric typewriters and printed on static-electricity presses all the needed leaflets, brochures, instruction manuals and diagrams.

Tricky problems were met with clever answers. For instance, argued one R&D V.P., "Won't the factory have to have at least a couple of pretty girls to use as models for the leaflet illustrations?"

"Nah," said an engineer bluntly. "Look, Boss, here's what we'll do."

He drew a quick and complicated schematic.

"I see," said the V.P., his eyes glazing.

Truthfully, he didn't understand at all, but then they went ahead and built it and he saw that the thing worked.

A memory-bank selector, informed of the need for a picture of a pretty girl operating, say, an electric egg-cooker, drew upon taped files of action studies of models for

the girl they wanted in the pose the computers decreed. Another tape supplied appropriate clothing—anything from a parka to a Bikini (mostly it was Bikinis) — and an electronic patcher dubbed it in. A third file, filmed on the spot, produced the egg-cooker itself, dubbed in as large as life and twice as pretty.

It worked.

And then there was the problem of writing the manuals.

It wasn't so much the actual composition of the how-to-do directions. There was nothing hard about *that*; after all, the whole idea was that the consumer should be told how to operate the thing without his having to know what was under the chromium-plated shell. But — well, what about trademarked names? Some brain had to coin the likes of Kleen-Heet Auto-Tyme Hardboyler, or Shel-Krak Puncherator.

THEY tried programming the computer to think that sort of thing up. The computer gulped, clucked and spewed out an assortment. The engineers looked at each other and scratched their heads. Kleen-Krak Boylerator? Eg-Statik Clocker?

Discouraged, they trailed with their reports to the V.P.

"Boss," they said, "maybe we better put this thing back on the drawing boards. These names the

machine came up with don't make sense."

This time it was the V.P. who said bluntly: "Nah, don't worry. Didn't you ever hear of Hotpoint Refrigerators?"

So merrily they went on, and the cavern factories were automated.

Then, when the frantically dreaming engineers had them complete, they added one more touch.

Electric percolators need steel, chromium, copper, plastics for the extension cord, plastics for the handle, a different sort of plastic yet for the ornamental knobs and embellishments. So they supplied them — not by stockpiles, no, for stockpiles can be used up, but by telling the vast computers that ran the plant where its raw materials might be found.

They supplied National Electro-Mech with a robot-armed computer that could sniff out its raw materials and direct diggers to the lodes. They added a fusion power-plant that would run as long as its supply of fuel held out (and its fuel was hydrogen, from the water of Long Island Sound or, if that went dry, from the waters bound in the clay, the silicate sand, the very bedrock underneath).

Then they pushed the little red switch to "on," stepped back — and ducked.

Percolators came pouring out by the thousands that first day.

Then the machines began to

speed up. Percolators flooded out by the tens of thousands. And then the machines settled down to full production.

"Ahem," coughed one of the engineers. "Say," he said. "I wonder. That little red button. Suppose we wanted to turn it off. *Could we?*"

Top management frowned. "Don't you know there's a war on?" they asked. "Production — that's what counts. Then, when the war is won, we can worry about turning the fool thing off. Right now, we can't take the risk that enemy agents might penetrate our defenses and cripple our war effort, so the button only works one way."

Then the war was won. And, yes, they could worry.

III

ON the ramp outside Farmingdale, Major Commaigne rattled into his microphone: "Korowicz! Back me up and watch for missiles. You're air cover for the whole detachment. Bonfils, I want you on the road. Draw fire when the trucks come out, and then retire. Goodpastor, you cover the demolition crews. Gershenow, you're our reserve. Watch it now. They'll be coming out in a minute." He clicked off his microphone switch and stared, sweating, at the ramp.

Bill Cossett shifted nervously in his seat and looked at the rifle in

his hand. It was a stripped-down rough-duty model, made to Jack Tighe's personal specifications, and the only thing you had to remember was that when you pulled the trigger, it would go off. But rifles weren't much a part of Cossett's life. He caught himself thinking wretchedly how nice it would be to be back in Rantoul. Then he remembered those crowded blocks of unsold Buicks.

Behind their halftrack, the four other vehicles of the party rattled into position. This ramp was one of eighteen that led from National Electro-Mech's plant to the outside world. Along it, at carefully randomized intervals, huge armored trailer-trucks rumbled up, past six sets of iridium-steel gates, out into the open air and onto the highways. No driver manned these trucks. Their orders were stamped into their circuits in the underground loading bays. Each had a destination where its load of percolators and waffle irons was to go, and each had the means of getting it there.

Bill Cossett coughed. "Major, why couldn't we just shoot them up as they come out?"

"They shoot back," said Major Commaigne.

"Yes, I know, but maybe we could use the same tactics. Automatic weapons. Let them fight it out — our robot guns against the trucks. Then—"

"Mr. Cossett," said the major wearily, "I'm glad to see you're thinking. But believe me, we've all had those thoughts." He gestured at the approaches to the ramp. "Look at those roads. You think there hasn't been plenty of fighting there?"

Cossett looked at the approaches and felt foolish. There was no doubt of it — every road for a mile around was tank-trenched, Cadmus-toothed, booby-trapped. Those were the first — and most obvious — measures the population had taken, in its early mob panic. But the trailer-trucks had been too smart for anything so simple. They had bridged the trenches, climbed the rows of dragon's teeth, and exploded the land mines harmlessly against the drum-chains that ceaselessly pounded the roads ahead of them.

"We had to stop," the major brooded, "because it just wasn't safe to live around here. The factories fight back, of course. The tougher we make it for them, the more ingenious their counterattacks and — *Stations!*" he blazed, thumbing down the microphone switch. "*Here they come!*"

The scarred outer gate whined open. A monster peered hesitantly out.

NO brain — no organic brain, at least, only a maze of copper, tungsten, glass — was in it, but the

truck was eerily human as it tested the air, searched its surroundings, peered radar-eyed for possible enemies. The trucks learned. They knew. There was no circuit in their electronic intellects for wondering *why*, but their job was to get the merchandise delivered, and one of the sub-tasks in the job assignment was to clear the way of obstacles.

The obstacle named Major Commaigne yelled: "Hold your fire!"

Silently, their weapons hunted the vulnerable spots of axles and steering linkages on the trucks as they came out, but in each armored car, the gunners held down the interrupt buttons that kept the guns from going off. The trucks came lumbering out, flailing the roads, turrets wheeling to scan the terrain around. There were eight of them. Then:

"Fire!" bawled Major Commaigne, and the battle was on.

Bonfils, down the road, darted out of concealment and blasted the first trucks. There was no confusion, no hesitation, as the trucks regrouped and returned fire; but Bonfils had wasted no time either, and he was out of range in a matter of seconds.

Korowicz added his fire as the first defensive missiles roared up. Gershenow caught two of the trucks trying to execute a flanking movement. It was a fine little fire fight.

But it wasn't the main show.

"Demolition teams in!" roared Commaigne, and Goodpastor's half-track bobbed up out of concealment and landed its mining experts at the lip of the ramp itself. The controlling machines had many circuits for directing simultaneous activities, but the number was not infinite. They had good reason to hope that with the active battle out on the road, the principal guardians of the factory might not be able to repel an attack on the entrance.

Commaigne snapped down his gas helmet and said thickly, through the gagging canvas and plastic: "We're next."

Bill Cossett nodded, licked his lips and put his own helmet on as their car circled the battle and headed for the ramp. Before they got there, the demolition team had blown off the first of the sets of gates. Thin gray-brown smoke still curled out, and already the demolition men were setting their charges for the second gate, twenty yards farther down.

"Now," said Major Commaigne, halting the halftrack and opening the hatch. "Be careful!" he warned, leading the detachment out, but it was hardly necessary. If they were all like himself, Bill Cossett thought, they were going to be careful indeed.

They marched on the heels of the demolition team down into the automated factory.

IT was noisy, and it was hot. It was dark, or nearly, except for the lights of the demolition team and what they carried themselves. The blasted gates were clicking and buzzing petulantly, attempting to close themselves, aware that someone was coming through, and resenting it.

Somebody yelled: "Watch it!" and, *shwissh-poo*, a tongue of liquid butane licked out across the ramp and puffed into flame. Everybody dropped — just in time. A smell of burning wool and a yowl from Major Commaigne showed how barely in time it had been.

One of the enlisted men cried: "It's onto us! Take cover!"

But everybody had already, of course — as much as they could, not knowing just what constituted "cover" in a place that the machine-brain that ran the factory had had a solid decade to study and chart. One of the machine's built-in 37-millimeter auto-aimed guns sniffed the infra-red spectrum for body heat, found it, aimed and fired.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," yammered the shells — *Vengo, vengo, vengo* — but there were blind spots around the shattered gates, and the invading party crouched in shelter.

Major Commaigne, hardly daring to raise his head, cried: "Everybody all right?"

There wasn't any answer, which meant either that everybody was indeed all right . . . or dead, and

thus exempted from the necessity of answering at all.

Deafened, sweltering, choking inside his anti-gas helmet, Bill Cossett swallowed hard and wished he'd kept his big mouth shut, back in Rantoul. What a committee to volunteer for!

Major Commaigne's combat boots kicked a pit in his kidneys as a .30 caliber machine-gun opened up, firing by pattern — twenty rounds at forty yards elevation and 270 degrees azimuth, traverse two degrees and fire another burst, traverse again, fire again, endlessly. It was area fire.

And it had one good feature.

"They've lost us!" Major Commaigne gloated.

The winking electronic brain inside the factory had lost sight of them — perhaps even thought they were disposed of — and was merely putting the finishing sterilizing touches on its disinfecting operation, in its meticulous machine fashion.

But Bill Cossett wasn't able to read that encouraging message out of the machine-gun fire. He didn't have the faintest idea what Major Commaigne was talking about; all he was able to tell was that the ramp was suddenly lit with a flickering light of tracer rounds, and the smell of the ammunition stifled him, and the noise of the guns and the heterodyne *squee* of the ricochets was enough to deafen. Not

to mention the fact that, with all that stuff flying around, a person could get *hurt*.

BUT Major Commaigne was ready for his sneak punch. He propped himself on an elbow, very cautiously, and peered down the tunnel to where the demolition crews were rigging a larger-than-normal charge.

"Ready?" he shouted.

One of the figures waved a hand.

"Then fire!" he bawled, and the demolition men thrust down a plunger.

Waroom. A corner of the wall at the remains of the shattered gate flew out and collapsed.

Bill Cossett stared. Down from the surface was clanking a machine — an enemy? But Major Commaigne was waving it on. One of theirs then, but he had never seen it before; never seen anything like it, in fact.

And that was not surprising.

Out of heaven knows what incalculable resources, the Pentagon had produced a Winnie's Pet. The story was that back in the old days Winston Churchill — yes, that long ago! — was fighting a war against Hitler, and Churchill decided that what he needed was a trench digger of heroic proportions. A *big* one, he dreamed, big enough so that in Flanders or at Soissons, it could have turned the tide of battle.

And so his design staff produced

the Winnie's Pet, a tunnel digger, huge in size. Well, maybe it would have turned the tide in 1917. But what war was ever fought in trenches again after that?

The machine was still around, though, and on the spot, because that was Major Commaigne's plan. He waved it on, into the breach in the armor-plating of the tunnel that his demolition crew had made. It was set for lateral tunneling. They gave it its head and followed it into a brand-new and therefore (presumably) unguarded tunnel that would parallel the ramp they were in, clear down to the factory itself.

Bill Cossett got up and ran after Major Commaigne and the others, unbelieving. It was all too easy! Behind them, the clatter of gunfire dwindled. There were no guns here — how could there be? They were safe.

Then —

"Ouch!" yelped Major Commaigne, inadvertently touching the wall, for it was hot. Then he grinned at Cossett, his face shadowed in the light from their helmet lamps and the tunnel. "Scared me for a minute," he said. "But it's all right. It must be fused — from the digging, you know. But—"

He stopped, thinking.

And it was only right that he should think, because he was wrong. It couldn't be atomic fusion that heated that wall. Why, Churchill didn't *have* atomic fusion to play

with back in 1940, when Winnie's Pet was built!

"Run!" shouted Major Commaigne. "You, there! Get out of that thing!"

The crew hesitated, then spilled out of the digger, and again just in time.

Because the heat had been atomic, all right, but the atoms were bursting at the command of the computer that ran the factory. Seismographs had detected the vibration of their tunneling; metal subterranean moles with warheads had been sent after them; as they raced out of the new tunnel at one end, the moles burst through at the other, struck the digger and exploded.

They made it up the ramp and to their waiting halftracks, but just barely.

And that was the end of Round One. If any referee in the world had been watching, I don't care who or how biased in favor of the human race, he would have given that round to the machines. It was an easy win, no contest; and the detachment brooded about it all the way back to the Pentagon.

IV

WELL, they didn't call him Unlickable Jack Tighe for nothing. In fact, they didn't call him Unlickable Jack at all then. That didn't come until later, and that's

another story. But already Tighe was demonstrating the qualities which made him great.

"There's got to be a way," he declared, and pounded the table. "There's got to."

The Committee of Activity silently licked its wounds, staring at him.

"Look, fellows," Tighe said reasonably, "men built these machines. Men can make them stop!"

Bill Cossett waited for somebody else to speak. Nobody did. "How, Mr. Tighe?" he asked, wishing he didn't have to be the one to put the question.

Tighe stared fretfully — and unansweringly — out of the Pentagon window.

"You just tell us how," Cossett went on, "because we don't know. We can't get in — we've tried that. We can't blow up the goods as they come out — we've tried that too. We can't cut off the power, because it's completely self-contained. What does that leave? The computer has more resources than we have, that's all."

"There's always a way," said obstinate Jack Tighe, and shifted restlessly in his leather chair. It was not that he wasn't used to positions of responsibility, for hadn't he been on the Plans Board of Yust & Ruminant? But running a whole country was another matter.

Marlene Groshawk coughed apologetically.

"Mr. Tighe, sir," she said. (You know who Marlene Groshawk is. *Everybody* does.)

Tighe said irritably: "Later, Marlene. Can't you see this thing's got me worried?"

"But that's what it's about, Mr. Tighe," she said, "sir. I mean it's about this thing."

She put her glasses on her pretty nose and looked at her notes. She, too, had come a long way from her public-stenographer days at Pung's Corners, and it wasn't entirely an upward path. Though no doubt there was honor to being the private secretary of old Jack Tighe.

She said: "I've got it all down here, Mr. Tighe, sir. You've tried brute force and you've tried subtlety. Well, what I ask myself is this: What would that wonderful, cute old TV detective Sherlock Holmes do?"

She removed her glasses and stared thoughtfully around the room.

MAJOR Commaigne burst out: "We could've been *killed*. But I don't mind that, Mr. Tighe. What hurts is that we failed."

Marlene said: "So what I would suggest is—"

"I can't go home and face my wife," Bill Cossett interrupted miserably. "Or all those Buicks."

"What Sher—"

Jack Tighe growled: "We'll lick it! Trust me, men. And now, unless

somebody else has a suggestion, I suppose we can adjourn this meeting. God knows we've accomplished nothing. But maybe sleeping on it will help. Any objections?"

Marlene Groshawk stuck up her hand. "Mr. Tighe, sir?"

"Eh? Marlene? Well, what is it?"

She removed her glasses and looked at him piercingly. "Sherlock Holmes," she said triumphantly. "He would have got in, because he would have *disguised* himself. There! Clear as the nose on your face, when you think of it, isn't it?"

Tighe took a deep breath. He shook his head and said, with more than ordinary patience: "Marlene, please stick to taking your shorthand. Leave the rest to us."

"But really, Mr. Tighe! Sir. I mean raw materials *do* get in, don't they?"

"Well?"

"So suppose—" she said, cocking her head prettily, tapping her small white teeth with a pencil in a judgmatical way — "suppose you fellows *disguised* yourselves. As *raw materials*. And didn't sneak in, but let the factory come and get you, so to speak. How about that?"

Jack Tighe was a great and wise man, but he had a lot on his mind. He yelled: "Marlene, what's the matter with you? That's the craziest—" he hesitated — "the craziest thing I ever—" he coughed—"it's the craziest . . . What do you mean, disguise themselves?"

"I mean disguise themselves," Marlene explained earnestly. "Like *disguise*. As raw materials."

Jack Tighe was silent for a second.

Then he pounded his desk. "Love of heaven," he cried, "I think she's got it! Captain Margate! Where's Captain Margate? You, Com-maigne! Get out of here on the double and get me Captain Margate!"

BILL COSSETT slipped quarters into the slot and waited for his wife in Rantoul to answer her phone.

Her image took form in the screen, hair curlers and the baggy quilted robe she liked to slop around in. But she was still an attractive woman. "Bill? That you? But the operator said Farmingdale."

"That's where I am, Essie. We, uh, we're going to try something." How did you say a thing like this without sounding heroic? It was hard, a fine line of distinction, for what he wanted was for his wife to think he was a hero, but not to think that he thought so too. "We're going to, well, sneak into the cavern here."

"Sneak in?" Her voice became piercing. "Bill Cossett! Those factories are *dangerous*. You promised me you wouldn't get in any trouble when I let you go east!"

"Now, Essie," he soothed.

"Please, Essie. It's going to be all right. I think."

"You *think*? Bill, tell me *exactly* what you're up to!"

"No I can't!" he said, suddenly panicky, staring at the phone as though it were an enemy. "They're all in it together, you see. The machines, I mean. I can't say over the phone—"

"Bill!"

"But they are, Essie. We found that out. National Electro-Mech's got a deep tunnel that goes clear to General Motors way out in Detroit, for trucks and so on. They get their computer parts from Philco in Philadelphia. How do I know the phone isn't in on it too? No—" he interrupted her as she was about to demand the truth — "please, Essie. Don't ask me. How are the kids? Chuck?"

"Skinned knee. But, Bill, you mustn't—"

"And Dan?"

"The doctor says it's only a little allergy. But I'm not going to—"

"And Tommy?"

She frowned. "I spanked him fifty times yesterday," she said, an exaggeration, certainly, but at least she was diverted from asking questions; she gave a concise catalogue of smashed dishes, spilled milk, unhung jackets and lost shoes; and Bill breathed again.

For what he told her had been the truth; he was suddenly deathly afraid that the automatic long-lines

dialing apparatus of the phone company might have been infiltrated by its electronic brethren in the factories. There was no sense in telling the enemy what you were about to do!

He managed to hang up without revealing his secret, and walked out of the booth to Major Commaigne's command post.

Heroes come in many forms, but it had never before occurred to A. Cossett, Authorized Buick Dealer, that a motor-car franchise holder, like a general, must sometimes offer his life in battle.

THE command post was busy, but that was natural enough, for this was a project to which the entire resources of the United States of America could well have been devoted.

And the effort was beginning to show results. Bill Cossett came to a scene of excitement. Major Commaigne was listening to an excited Captain Margate, while the rest of the detachment stood by.

Margate, as Bill Cossett had come to know, was Jack Tighe's personal expert in raw materials and the like. A good man, Cossett thought. And so was Major Commaigne, a can-do kind of guy. And this Marlene Groshawk who was tagging along—well, Essie wouldn't like *that*. But it was in line of duty. And, you know, kind of fun.

Hastily, Bill Cossett shifted his

thoughts back to the problem of getting into National Electro-Mech.

"Found it!" Captain Margate was crying, delighted. "We really found it! Geologists thought," he said, shaking his head in wonder, "that there wasn't any coal under Long Island, but trust the machines. They knew. We found it."

"Coal?" said Major Commaigne, his brows crinkling.

"Why, yes, Major," nodded the captain. "Coal. Raw materials, for your disguise."

"Disguise?" repeated Major Commaigne.

"That's right, Major."

"As lumps of coal?"

The captain shrugged cheerfully. "As organic matter," he clarified. "The machine, after all, won't mind. Coal is carbon — hydrocarbons—oh, you're close enough. The machine won't mind a few little eccentricities. Why," he went on, warming up, "the machine would still accept you even if you were a lot more impure than any of you really are."

Marlene Groshawk stamped her pretty foot. "Captain!"

"I mean in a chemical way, Miss Groshawk," the captain said humbly, and began to prepare their disguises.

Bill Cossett tugged at his collar. "Captain Margate," he said, "one thing. Suppose the factory catches us."

"It will, Mr. Cossett! That's the whole idea."

"I mean suppose it finds out we're not coal."

Captain Margate looked up thoughtfully from his pot of lamp-black and cold cream.

"That," he said meditatively, "would be embarrassing. I don't know what would happen exactly, but —" He shrugged. "Still, it's not the worst thing that could happen," he added without worry. "It might be a whole lot worse if it never does find out you're not raw materials."

"You mean—" gasped Marlene. "We'd be—"

Captain Margate nodded. "You'd be processed. And," he added gallantly, "you would make a very nice batch of plastic, Miss Groshawk."

V

IT was a most trying time for all of them, you may be very sure. But they were brave enough.

Major Commaigne let himself be smeared a sooty black without a flicker of his steel-gray eye or a quiver of his iron jaw.

Bill Cossett tried desperately to remember how *awful* things were back in Rantoul — "Yes, yes," he whispered frantically to himself, "even more awful than this."

Marlene Groshawk — well, you couldn't tell much from her expres-

sion. But she wrote later, in her memoirs, that she was really anxious about only one thing: How she would ever get all that stuff off?

Sappers had tunneled them a neat little hole into a bed of brownish gassy coal. "Ssh!" hissed Captain Margate, a finger to his lips. "Listen."

In the silence, there was a distant *chomp, chomp, chomp*, like a great far-off inchworm nibbling his way through armor-plate.

"The factory," the captain whispered. "We'll leave you now. Keep very still. Oh, and there are sandwiches and drinking water in that hamper. I don't know how long you'll have to wait."

And the captain and the sappers withdrew up the shaft.

Seconds later, a small explosive blast dumped the ceiling of the tunnel in, blocking it. The captain had warned them he would have to do that— "Don't want to make the factory suspicious, you know!"—but it was like that first clod of soil falling on the coffin of the living entombed man, all the same.

Time passed.

They ate the sandwiches and drank the water.

Time passed.

They began to get hungry again, but there wasn't anything to do about it, not any more. They couldn't even call the whole thing off now, because there wasn't any way to accomplish it. The distant

chomp, chomp was closer, true, but the darkness was closing in on them; the enforced silence was getting on their nerves; and the sulphury smell of the low-grade coal was giving Bill Cossett a splitting headache...

And then it happened.

Chomp, chomp. And a *rattle, bang.* And something broke through the coal shell around them with a splash of violet light. Stainless steel teeth, half a yard long, nibbled a neat circle out of the wall, swallowed, hiccupped and inched forward.

"Duck," whispered Major Commaigne in the girl's ear and, "Out of the way!" into Cossett's, though whispering was hardly needful in the metallic clangor around them. They crouched aside and the teeth gnawed past them, a yard a minute, trenching the floor of their little cavern and spewing the crushed coal onto a wide conveyor belt that followed the questing jaws.

"Jump!" murmured Commaigne when the teeth were safely by, and the three of them leaped onto the belt, nestled in shaking beds of coal fragments, borne upward and back toward the factory itself.

They lay quiet, hardly breathing, against what unknown spy-eyes or listening devices the factory might employ. But if there were such, they missed their mark, or the strategy worked. At a steady crawling pace, they were drawn upward

and into the growing din of National Electro-Mech's main plant. It was as easy as that.

Getting in was. But that was, of course, only the beginning.

WHEN National Electro-Mech put its factory under the sod of Farmingdale, the UERMWA, Local 606, had torn up the old contract and employed its best dreamers to invent a new one.

"Year-round temperature of 71.5°," said Clause 14a. "Not less than 40 cu. ft. of pure, fresh, filtered air per worker per minute," said Paragraph 9. "Lighting to be controlled by individual worker at his discretion," said Sub-Section XII.

It was underground, right enough, but it was very nice indeed. Why, they even had trouble, serious trouble, with one worker in ten refusing to go home even to sleep, especially during the hay-fever season.

But that was before automation had set in.

Now things were not nice at all, at least by human standards. Machines might have loved it, but —

Well, the lights, to begin with, were hardly the pleasant, glarefree fluorescents that Local 606 had had in mind. Why should they be? Human eyes relish the visible spectrum, but machines see by photoelectric cells, and photocells see as well by red or even infra-red . . . which is cheap to generate and

produces a satisfactory length of filament life. Consequently National Electro-Mech was now washed with a hideous ochre gloom.

The air — ah, that was a laugh. Whatever air the departing human workers chanced to leave behind was still there, for machines don't breathe. And the temperature was whatever it happened to be. In the remote ends of the galleries, it was chilly cold; in the area around the cookers, it was appalling.

And the noise!

Cringing, the three invaders gaped deafenedly around as they rode in on the conveyor belt. Bill Cossett stared through the blood-red gloom at a row of enormous stainless-steel spheres. He wondered what they were, and only glanced away in scant time to fling himself off the conveyor belt and yell: "Jump!"

The others obeyed just as the lumps of coal they had been traveling with thumped with a roar and suffocating dust into a huge hopper.

Beads of sweat broke out over them all. That coal was ultimately to be polymerized in the huge steel cookers Cossett had been staring at. The factory had not, of course, bothered to sweep away the excess heat with blowers. Why should it? But it wasn't only the heat that brought out the sweat; they could hear the coal being powdered and whooshed away.

They got out of there, holding

hands to keep together, tripping and stumbling in the bloody dusk.

"Watch it!" bawled the major in Cossett's ear, and Cossett ducked one horrifying instant before something huge and glittering swooped by his ear.

This was, after all, an appliance factory, and Cossett couldn't help thinking that a factory should have certain recognizable features. Aisles, for example, between the machines.

But the cavern factory didn't need aisles. Most factory traffic is in the changing of the shifts, the to-and-fro traffic of the coffee break, the casual promenade to the powder room or water cooler. None of these phenomena occurred in the manless caverns. Therefore the machine-mind had ended corridors and abolished aisles. It dumped jigs and bobbins where they were most convenient — to a machine, not to a man. The movement of fresh parts and the carting away of finished assemblies was done by overhead trolleys.

As Cossett blinked after the one that had nearly whacked him, he caught glimpse of another shadow out of the corner of his eyes.

"Watch it!" he yelled, and grabbed Marlene slipperily by the neck as a pod of toasters swept by.

They all dropped to the littered floor and got up, swearing — except that Marlene didn't swear. She was much too ladylike; that is, in *that*



way. But she said. "We ought to do our job and get out of here."

They looked at each other, a pathetic trio, smeared with grease and soot. They were lost in a howling, hammering catacomb. They were unarmed and helpless against a smart and powerful factory of machines and weapons.

"This was a dopy idea from the beginning," moaned Cossett. "We'll never get out."

"Never," agreed the major, daunted at last.

"Never," nodded Marlene, and paused, frowning prettily in the gloom. "Unless we get thrown up," she added.

"You mean thrown out," Cossett corrected.

Marlene shook her head. "I mean upchucked," she said in a refined manner, "like when you have an upset stomach."

THE two men looked at each other.

"The place *does* eat, in a way," said Cossett.

"It's a mistake to be teleological," Commaigne objected.

"But it does eat."

"Let's think it out," said Major Commaigne authoritatively, hitting the dirt to avoid a passing coil of extension cords. "Suppose," he called up to the others, "we blow up the conveyor belt and those cookers. This will undoubtedly interfere with the logistics of the command-

apparatus, right? It will then certainly try to find out what happened, and will, we must assume, discover that certain alien entities — ourselves, that is — found their way in through the raw-material receptors. Well, then! What is there for the thing to do but close down its receptors? And when it has done so, it will be cut off from the things it needs to continue manufacturing. Consequently, we may take as provisionally established, it will be unable — what?"

Bill Cossett, bawling at him from under a parts table where he had taken refuge, repeated: "I said, where's Marlene?"

The major clambered to his knees. The girl was gone. In the dull, clattering, crashing gloom, strange shapes moved wildly about, but none of them seemed to be Marlene. She was gone and, the major suddenly discovered, something was gone with her — the bag of explosives.

"Marlene!" screamed the two men.

And, though it was only chance, she at once appeared.

"Where have you *been*?" the major demanded. "What were you *doing*?"

The girl stood looking down at them for a second.

"I think we'd better get out of the way," she said at last. "I took the bombs. I think I've given the thing a tummy-ache."

They had gone less than a dozen yards when the first of the little bombs went off, with a sodium-yellow glare and a firecracker bang; but it knocked a hundred yards of conveyor belt off the track.

And then the fun really began...

Less than an hour later, they were back on the surface, watching plumes of smoke trickle from fifty concealed ventilators scattered across the plain outside Farmingdale.

Jack Tighe was delighted. "You clobbered it!" he gloated. "And it let you get out?"

"Kicked us out," exulted the major. "We were in the raw-materials area, you know. As far as I can tell, the factory has closed down the raw-materials operation entirely. It swept everything off what was left of the conveyor belt, us included—believe me, we had to step pretty quick to keep from getting hurt! Then it plugged up the belt tunnel, and as we were getting away, I saw a handling machine beginning to put armor-plate over the plug."

Jack Tighe howled: "We've licked it! Tell you what," he said suddenly, "let's give it a *real* belly-ache. Plant a few more bombs in the coal beds to make sure . . ."

And they did but, really, it didn't seem quite necessary; the cavern factory had withdrawn completely within itself. No further attempts were made to get raw materials, then or ever.

In the next few days, while Tighe's men tried the same tactic on factory after factory, all across the face of the continent—and always with the same success—the armed guards outside National Electro-Mech's plant had very little to do. The factory wasn't quite dead, no. Twice the first day, occasionally in the days that followed, a single furtive truck would come dodging out of the exit ramps. But only one truck, where there had been scores; and that one only partly loaded, and an easy target for the guards.

It was victory.

There was no doubt about it.

Jack Tighe called for a day of national rejoicing.

VI

WHAT a feast it was! What a celebration!

Jack Tighe was glowing with triumph and with joy. He was old and stern and powerful, but his hawk's face was the face of a delighted boy.

"Eat, my friends," he boomed, his voice rolling through the amplifiers. "Enjoy yourselves! A new day has dawned for all of us, and here are the glorious three who made it possible!"

He swept a generous arm toward those who sat beside him on the dais. Applause thundered.

The three heroes were all there.



Major Commaigne sat erect, tunic crisp, buttons gleaming, a bright new scarlet ribbon over all the other ribbons on his chest, where Jack Tighe had impulsively created a new decoration on the spot. Marlene Groshawk sat beside him, radiant. Bill Cossett was stiff, grin-

ning uncomfortably as he sat next to his wife (who was staring thoughtfully at Marlene Groshawk).

Jack Tighe bawled: "Eat, while the Marine Band plays us a march! And then we will have a few words from the heroes who have saved us all!"



It was a glorious picnic. *Hail to the Chief* bounced brassily off the bright blue sky. Cossett sat miserably, no longer stiff, wondering what the devil he would find to say, when he noticed that the brassy bugles of the Marine Corps Band faded ringingly away.

A uniformed officer had dashed breathlessly through the crowd to the rostrum. He was whispering up to Jack Tighe, a look of tense excitement on his face.

After a moment, Tighe stood up, hands raised, a smile on his face.

"There's nothing to worry about, friends," he called, "nothing at all! But there's a *little* life in the cavern factory yet. The colonel here tells me that another truck is coming out of the ramp, that's all. So please just stay where you are and watch our boys knock it off!"

PANIC? No, there wasn't any panic — why should the crowd have panicked? It was a kind of circus, an extra added attraction, as risk-free as the bear-baiting at a Sussex village fair.

Let the obstinate old factory send its trucks out, thought the assembled thousands with a joy of anticipation, it'll be fun to watch our boys smash them up! And it surely can't mean anything. The battle is won. The factories can go on plotting underground as long as they like, but you can't make toasters without copper and steel, and there hasn't been any of *that* going in for weeks. No, pure fun, that's all it is!

And so they took advantage of the spectacle, climbing on chairs to see better, the fathers lifting the youngest to their shoulders. And the truck came whooping out. *Rattle, rattle*, the machine-guns roared. *Wush* went the rocket launchers. The truck didn't have a chance. In convoys, in the old days, a few always got through; but here was only one, and it got clobbered for fair.

Bill Cossett, hand in hand with his wife, went over to look at the smoldering ruins. The crowd fell back respectfully.

Essie Cossett said gladly: "Serves them *right*! Those darn machines, they think they own us. I just wish I could get down there to watch them starving and suffering, like Mr. Tighe said. What are those things, dear?"

Cossett said absently: "What things?" His attention was fixed on what the bazooka charge had done to the truck's armored radiator grill, and he was thinking of how handily a rocket launcher belonging to the factory might have done the same to him.

"Those shiny things."

"*What* shiny — Oh." In the yawning flank of the truck, its steel plates sprung by half a dozen shells, a sort of metallic crate hung its edge over the lip of the hole. It was stenciled:

NATIONAL

Electro-Mech Appliances

1½ Gross Cigarette Lighters

And from a dangling flap of the crate, small, shiny globules were oozing out—dripping out, but it was odd, because the confounded things were dripping *up*. They squeezed out like water from a leaky tap, bright, striated things, and, *plop*, they were free and floated away.

"Funny," said Bill Cossett to his

wife, vaguely apprehensive. "But it can't be anything to worry about. Cigarette lighters! I never saw any like that."

Wonderingly he took his own cigarette case-and-lighter combination from his pocket.

He opened it.

He held it in his hand to read the name stamped on the bottom, to see if by chance it was a National Electro-Mech.

Pflut. One of the shiny things swooped down on him, danced above the case, came toward his face. He felt a harsh, urgent thrusting at his lips, ducked, coughed, choked, nearly strangled.

COSSETT scrambled to his feet, tore the cigarette out of his mouth, looked at it, threw it to the ground.

"Good God!" he cried. "But how can they? We closed them down!"

And all over the enormous crowd, others were making the same discovery, and the same error of deduction. From a smashed crate labeled *Perc-o-Matics, 8-Cup*, a shimmering series of little globes of light was whisking its way out into the air and around the crowd.

Coffee makers? Yes, they were coffee makers.

"Help!" yelled a woman whose jug of icewater was snatched out of her hands; and "Stop!" shrilled another, attempting to open a can of Maxwell House.

Coffee grounds and water swam around in the air, like the jets at Versailles drowning the brown sands of Coney Island. Then the soggy used grounds neatly burrowed into the ground out of sight and the shimmering globe towed a sphere twice larger than itself from cup to cup, dispensing perfect coffee every time.

A four-year-old, watching with his mouth agape, absently let his ham sandwich dangle. "Ouch!" he yelled, rubbing suddenly reddened fingers as another little sphere, this one emerald green, took the bread from his hand, toasted it a golden brown, expertly caught the falling ham and restored it to him before the ham had a chance to touch the ground.

"Bill!" shrieked Essie Cossett. "What is this? I thought you stopped the factory."

"I thought so too," muttered her husband blankly, watching the frightened crowd with eyes bright with horror.

"But didn't you cut off their raw materials? Isn't that how you stopped it?"

Bill Cossett sighed. "We cut off the raw materials," he admitted. "But evidently that won't stop the factories. They're learning to do without. Force fields, magnetic flux—I don't know! But that truck was full of appliances that didn't use any raw materials at all!"

He licked dry lips. "And that's

not the worst part of it," he said, so softly that his wife could hardly hear. "I can face it if the bad old days come back again. I can stand it if every three months a whole new model comes out, and we have to sell, sell, sell and buy, buy, buy. But —

"But these things," he said sickly, "don't look as though they'll ever wear out. How can they? They aren't made of matter at all! And when the new models keep coming out — *how are we ever going to get rid of the old ones?*"

— FREDERIK POHL



FORECAST

Next issue (dated October, and we'll explain that down below) assembles another great cargo of reading that GALAXY now carries — "Such a tomel" exclaims Mrs. Howard N. Bowman, Port Alsworth, Alaska, winning the brevity award — in the following seaworthy fashion:

Up forward is a big novella, *SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME* by Christopher Grimm, Orientally devious in plot, up-to-tomorrow in ideas and backgrounds. Its hero is uncompromisingly villainous, its villain heroic and with a heart of gold, its heroine a strumpet with a heart of brass, its dross is treasure and its treasure dross, and much of it takes place in anything but a place — and if you can beat these and other puzzles to the finish line, you have an even wickeder mind than its author's.

Amidships and astern are two novelets, *WAY UP YONDER* by Charles Satterfield and *SILENCE* by John Brunner, and possibly more than two. The first is a rousing romp, the second a breath-catching suspense story.

Placed strategically for ballast — and quick reading for brief breaks — are several short stories, and our regular features, and a four-compartment article by Willy Ley, one compartment being about an accident that would have changed recent history if it had ever happened, another on the only non-animal that has become extinct since prehistoric times.

Starting with the next issue, GALAXY will be clad more durably. Sorry it took so long to work off our supply of cover stock, but it's gone now and our armorplate will be much more in keeping with the oversize of the magazine.

About the October dateline: Most newsstand dealers check their shelves at the beginning of each month — and send back all mogoazines dated that month! To avoid being taken off sale prematurely, we have to date a month ahead of our off-sale date. An annoying trade practice, but we can't buck it. About dropping "Science Fiction" from the title — we always intended to establish GALAXY as a science fiction magazine, then drop the term because it scares many away from buying — but not, as you've noted, changing the magazine itself.

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